

• HEARTS
CONTENDING •

GEORG SCHOGK

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HEARTS CONTENDING

A NOVEL

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I

COMING HOME

THOUGH she was so contented, the afternoon passed slowly for Susanna Heilig. The house was still: nobody walking through the hall, nobody in the parlor, nobody up-stairs. They had all gone in different directions, and she looked out and wished them back again. She could not see far: through the east window the mill, where her son Jesse presided; through the south window a few yards of the road by which the others would return; no more, for the February mist shut her in.

Early in the afternoon she had made a tour of the house, as she did every day of her life, the inspection of the commodious domain gave her such a pleasant sense of mistresship. In the large upper rooms, now full of light reflected from snow, stood chest after chest of bedding, beloved by her: home-made quilts, home-spun sheets, home-woven coverlets of various colors, the work of ancestresses skilful as Penelope. So many movements of patient fingers, accompanied by thoughts that were sometimes fiery, had gone to their making that they were like paragraphs of family history materialized. Susanna could have found

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any one of them in the dark. The parlor also, papered with a pattern of irises whose own bulbs would not have known them, and furnished on a scale of dignified recklessness, was exactly as she wanted it; but it was of the kitchen that she could say, "Here I am happiest." When she came to die she would think of leaving life as leaving the kitchen. The stove, which could accommodate a harvest-time dinner, and the table, capable of indefinite enlargement, gave invitations. On the window-sills geraniums and begonias industriously bloomed. The grandfather's clock had come from her family. Before her eyes had lost their vague, infant blueness she had stared at the flowers inlaid on the mahogany case, and she had started for school by its advice, so that to her its stroke had a paternal sound.— Among the contents of the dresser the place of honor was held by a pewter beer-mug marked "J. H. 1735," which had accompanied the immigrant Johann Heilig on his journey from a Rhenish village to Philadelphia. When Susanna regarded the clock with a possessive air, her husband's eye reverted to the mug. This inscription had perhaps inspired the other, "J. H. 1867," cut on a corner of the wood-chest, laboriously, by Jesse, on the occasion of his remaining alone at home on a Sunday morning. That inscribed corner was now a favorite seat of his.

At present Susanna's sewing-tools occupied it. She was at her quilting-frame, quilting arabesques on a petticoat and listening for sleigh-bells; and she listened so eagerly that she thought she heard them, and made haste to see. Immediately the room was filled with out-door sounds of dripping and trickling; the wet, white fog drew in, and she came back, saying aloud: "Why should I feel like this

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because they are not here? There is nothing to hurt them."

However, she put away the quilting and consulted the clock. Her movements covered no extra inch of space, the large gold hoops in her ears scarcely swung, and her pose before the mild timepiece would have befitted a priestess contemplating the sacrificial mystery which she was about to interpret. She looked like a mother of sons. Inspecting the beloved possession, she planned to try a new way of polishing it; she admired the face; she even opened the case, and looked at the weights and the pendulum. Then a foreign body caught her eye, and she pulled out a pack of cards. Her laugh sounded very spontaneous amid the un-intermittent dripping and ticking. "Now that must have been Job himself who hid them in my clock," she said, as she disposed of the cards in the stove. "The children would not hide them where I should be sure to look."

This was a persistent contest in the family. Jesse had come back from school an enthusiastic euchre-player; he had taught his brother and sister; their father had been involved, and had developed a talent—all under the unlangushing opposition of Susanna. They knew that she would burn every card she found, she knew that they would always produce new ones, and both parties applied their wits to the subject of hiding-places, so that it became a rivalry. She was still laughing, in solitary triumph, when a noise, not of bells but of trampling feet, hurried her to the window.

Outside the white air blended with the snow; the trees which surrounded the house looked like shadowy paintings on porcelain. The trampling and splashing continued, and from the white emerged a splendid group. Antony, Susanna's eldest son, was returning from the blacksmith's

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shop. He rode, without a saddle, a horse white as the mist, and led by a rope a pair of gray roans. All three were tossing their heads until the manes streamed. The rope held the restless heads together; the steaming bodies curved apart; the hoofs splashed in the slush. Antony, managing them easily with one wrist, went straight by, into the fog. Only Susanna's husband was a dearer sight to her.

When he was gone she proceeded, with a proud step, to start the fire; that was what she could do for him at that moment. Then she got her Bible and sat by the window, to make a grateful use of what little light remained. She always read where the book opened, and tried to apply what she read, and she did so now, although the most boastful of the Psalms would have suited her feelings better than what presented itself.

“‘ There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.’

“‘ He was like my husband Job.

“‘ And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters.’

“‘ Antony, Jonathan, Esther, Jesse.

“‘ His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she-asses, and a very great household.’”

Her father had kept sheep, so it was easy for her to imagine the land of Uz as a country where they would thrive—green, hilly, and well-watered, “like this Heiligthal.”

“‘ So that this man was the greatest of all the men of the East.’

“‘ My husband Job owns the land from the Himmelberg

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to the Blaueberg, far up into the timber-land. When I look out on a clear day I cannot see beyond his land; all the high ground which encloses me is his. The mill is his also, and the finest of stock, and money upon money thereto. Everywhere he is looked to: in the church and out of it, all wait for his opinion. There is no one in this county nor in the four counties around it like my man.

“With all this melting snow, it will be bad driving over the Blaueberg. I wish that he were safely here.”

There came a real sound of sleigh-bells, and without a thought for the troubles of the other Job, she laid the Bible down; but it was not her husband. A cutter in which a young woman was driving a young man splashed past the window, and while the lamp was being lighted a draught of wet air announced the only daughter, of whom Susanna regretted that she was not more like herself. The square, plain, kind-looking girl must attract by her ways, for Nature had been economical with her. She inquired for her father the first moment, while she spread her bundles on the table.

“I brought everything,” she continued. “Here are the cinnamon and nutmegs. Saul has the sugar. Here is the coffee. Here is your dress. It is not so pretty by lamp-light, but by day it is the prettiest color I ever saw. Mother, you will look splendid!”

“This is good cloth, and a good purple. You show judgment in your buying, Esther.”

A revolutionary fashion, such as requires restraining of the feminine eye, had lately penetrated to the Heilighthal, and now occasioned serious talk and some experimental draping of the beautiful stuff. Both women wore the expression of laboring geometers when many heavy boots reached the porch, and more wet air sharpened the kitchen

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perfume of spices and apples. The young men who followed the blast explained Susanna's pride.

Antony, coming in first, made no salutation in words, and showed appreciation of the presence of his mother and sister only by a rather pleasant dwelling upon them of his large black eyes. Those sombre eyes were limited between four walls; they should have swept a prairie or gazed down from a peak. His body displayed so perfect a proportion of bone and hard flesh that there was not an inch to wish away. He sat as still as a bowlder, and no one spoke to him: the family never made conversation with Antony. It might have been wondered what he found to do to utilize himself; his size, and all that it implied, might easily become tormenting.

The fair complexion of the next young man showed that he was no son of Susanna. Saul Gantner, the Heiligs' first cousin, lived with them and taught the country school. He carried a pile of books, whose very covers suggested young children coerced and disciplined, and a large bundle of sugar, which he delivered to his aunt with a little pleasant ceremony. Esther assured herself by a glance that he was comfortable, and his friendly face, which was raw from the cold, regained its natural color when he had enjoyed the warmth for a while. This patient enjoyment was piteous, for Saul looked like a man harassed by needs proper to him which he could not satisfy and must therefore hide.

Jesse did not sit; he went to the table, smelled the spices, felt the cloth, and inquired concerning an unopened package.
"What's this?"

"Oranges," answered Esther, with a glance requesting the approval of her mother for this unauthorized luxury.
"Father likes them."

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Jesse took one. "And what's this?"

"Sour-balls for all of us. Do you remember, when we were little, mother always brought sour-balls when she went to the store on Saturday?"

Jesse leaned against a corner of the chest and began to toss and catch his orange, and the lamp threw a strong beam across him, exhibiting the little veils of flour on his shoulders. He was taller than Antony, and looser in the joints; his eyes were mobile and a little moist. A few changes, and he would have resembled Antony; a few other changes, and he would have resembled a very different man. There were signs upon his face of follies and of regrets for them. Life was full of interest to Jesse, who won love easily.

"What's new?" asked Saul.

"I know nothing new. I was in the mill all day, grinding and grinding." By his inflection Jesse not only reproduced the monotony of his task, but also derided the human lot in its entirety.

"That's new—for you to know nothing new."

"I saw no one but yourself, coming home in the cutter with Esther."

The remark could not have been more innocent if it had been a bleat, but it was made significant by a turn of the mobile eye. Saul replied, deliberately: "Yes. She passed the school-house, and stopped for me."

"That was considerate on her part. You must have been glad to see her."

"I was glad to see her."

Esther, who had been momentarily out of the room, now reappeared, carrying a piled egg-basket, which looked ready to be emblazoned neatly on the arms of a poultry-merchant. She showed a care-free face above it. "I saw

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such pretty valentines at the store," she said, happily—"big lace ones, and satin ones with fringe, and one had flowers hand-painted!"

"Ah!" said Jesse, with another cock of his eye at Saul. "If a man wants a girl and has not courage to ask her, how appropriate a valentine is? And if he only wants to love her a little, what could be better than a valentine? So safe! He can always say that it had a convenient meaning, no less and no more. The valentine manufacturers must have sympathy for such fellows. Perhaps it is they who go into the business."

"Are there, then, such men?"

Every one in the room looked around at Saul. Jesse leaned forward.

"Once a man knows that he loves a woman, he will use the poorest of his own poor words rather than such a foolish printed verse written by the dozen for money. And as for the man who wants his woman, as you say—to love her a little only—that is no man at all."

As Saul's German was modified by his knowledge of English and Latin, anything that he said had a distinctive quality; and these sentences appeared to emanate from an engrossing course of thought, which he continued, resting his hands on his knees and looking gravely at the floor. Jesse watched like a scientist gratified by a new specimen acting in the anticipated manner; and Esther, bewildered by having precipitated so much, said, timorously:

"They were pretty valentines, Saul."

"Mother knows more than any of us about valentines," said Jesse. "I believe, if the truth were known, mother has valentines now, put away in her box. And are they all from father?"

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“Your father sent me a handsome one the week after he first saw me.” Susanna was enlivened by flattering recollections. “It was verses, written in a beautiful fancy hand on a sheet with a lace edge and a rosebud in the corner, and at the bottom he drew two birds with feathery tails sitting on a heart—Now, Esther, set the table.”

Her mother dropped so abruptly from very cheerful to very low that Esther was startled. She objected. “Father is not yet here.”

“For that reason I want the boys to eat, and if he does not come, to look for him. I am not easy about him. All the afternoon I have not been easy. I feel as if he had met danger on the mountain. Perhaps he had trouble with the horses. He drove the colt.”

Antony spoke for the first time. “He drove the bay mare with the colt; and the colt is as steady as a fence-post, and father is the best driver who comes over the Blaueberg.”

No one being able to add anything decisive, nothing more was said. Susanna was soon more sibylline than ever, with her pan of hot fat bubbling and steaming as if to create the traditional atmosphere for ambiguous prophecy. Job’s sleigh-bells were quite near before she heard them.

It was unusual for him to stop at the house instead of driving on to the barn; his expression also was unusual. He and Susanna saluted each other from opposite sides of the room, more like friendly sovereigns meeting than a husband and wife of nearly thirty years.

“Saul, put away my horses,” he ordered. “Antony, hitch in the light buggy a horse that has not been out to-

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day, and saddle your black. Jesse and Esther, eat your supper. Lose no time."

"Job, what has happened?"

"Nothing that touches us."

"For hours I have had it on my mind that you had met danger on the Blaueberg. Now you return, very late, looking unlike yourself. Why is it?" his wife inquired.

"Lieb is dead."

"Lieb! on the mountain!" Susanna was so relieved that she could be irritated. "Why should that make you late, and make you solemn, and send the boys hurrying in every direction?"

"I shall explain. Esther and Jesse, eat while you listen. Lieb's house, as you know, is the only one between us and the mountain-top, on that lonely road. This afternoon I could not see it at all; it stands back, and the mist was thick; I hardly knew when I passed it. All the way down I did not meet a soul, and I did not expect to meet any one; so I was surprised to see near the foot of the mountain a girl walking alone in all the slush and fog. It was Bertha Lieb."

"His daughter?"

"Yes. It was plain that she was glad to see some one; but there was more than that in her eyes, so I asked her what was wrong, and she said, 'Father just died.' I made her get up beside me, and questioned her further; and it seems that they were sitting by the stove, and she was sewing, and she said something and got no answer, and he was dead."

"Poor girl! Poor thing!" said Esther; and Jesse added, "I saw her once."

"I thought she might be mistaken, and I said that we

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must go back. She did not agree immediately; she was on her way to the undertaker; but I told her that everything should be done. The house is nothing but a board hut in the woods; it made me think of an old wet bird's-nest. I saw her begin to shiver when we went in. There he sat in his chair, and he looked peaceful."

"Is she alone there with him?" asked Susanna.

"Yes. Now, Antony can attend to what is necessary, and Esther and Jesse can take the buggy and drive up there. Send provisions for a day or two. The house looked very, very poor."

The family scattered. Saul and Antony, who had stood listening, departed; Susanna prepared bountifully, liking the sense of largesse. There was an interval of quick walking in and out, and the opening and shutting of doors; lanterns moved outside, and feet of men and horses tramped—a neighborly response to the solemn emergency, such as greets Death in the country, where there is more room for him. Presently Antony's black went loping through the slush, and Esther and Jesse drove away with lighted carriage-lamps and sitting awkwardly among baskets. Saul stayed at the barn to do the evening work. Only Job and Susanna remained in the depopulated kitchen.

Inviting him by a gesture to sit and eat, she silently supplied his wants with a proud diligence. "This is the king of all my world," her air implied. "To serve him honors and delights me." Job justified such homage. He was a mighty man. His beaver collar and knee-boots became him; his beaver cap was forgotten on his head; his short whip lay forgotten across his knees; and his attitude was temporary, as if he were ready to be up and off again.

"Eat more," she urged.

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“I want no more.”

He pushed back his chair, and sat thinking; and she went about her work, expressing the posture of her mind by an occasional ancillary glance. She had accomplished much before he spoke.

“Susanna, that was a sad sight.”

“Lieb?”

“The girl. It was strange to see a young thing so quiet.”

“You had seen her before?”

“Once. Lieb was no sad sight to me, because I believe that he was glad to go. I used to meet him often when I went over the mountain, and sometimes we talked, and once it happened that he told me about himself. He was for years a school-teacher in Schuylkill County. He had a wife and four children, and three of them and the wife he lost close together. Then about eight months ago he went up there with this girl. They had a garden and a cow, and I suppose that they just managed to live.”

“And now what becomes of her?”

“She has no place; they have no near relatives. I think that we should do well to take her in. She knows how to work, I could see that from her well-kept house, and I do not like it that you and Esther have help only for haying and harvesting.”

He waited for an answer, feeling the opposition in his wife's mind as it formed.

“Well?”

“We do not know what this Bertha is; but if she comes, we shall think that we must keep her. It is not as if she had a home to go to if we turn her out.”

“If you are against it, I say no more.”

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However, he looked at her as if he expected her to behave generously.

“It is strange that they lived there for eight months and I never saw her. Is she a pretty girl?”

“She is strong and healthy. That you have never seen her is in her favor. She kept close at home, and if there was buying to be done, her father went.”

He still waited for her to be generous; but she hesitated, and he turned away and sat looking thoughtfully before him and stroking his short white beard. She was glad for the transfer of his attention.

“Susanna,” he said, after a while, “when I left poor Lieb, who had lived so hard, and died and left his daughter to the world, and when I drove down the mountain into this Thal which belongs to me, I thought of many things. We have been blessed.”

“Yes; but it is through your work.”

“What could I have done alone?”

“Would all this have come to us if you had done nothing?”

He shook his head, and seemed to forget her.

The question between them became unimportant to her, she was so proud of him. Her eyes showed her good reason for her pride; her memory supplied from the events of their life together innumerable reasons more. She was glad to sacrifice her judgment.

“Let us send for the girl, Job,” she said.

She was standing beside him, and now she put her hand upon his shoulder in a gesture of fealty. Egyptian wives and husbands had their likenesses made in that position; and the little, staring figures, which have lasted out the centuries between, show how old that fealty is.

II

SAUL GIVES LESSONS

A STRANGER passing through the Heiligthal on Ash Wednesday would have thought himself among extremely devout people. On that day every house was cleaned from top to bottom, and the dust burned; every garden was covered with ashes, which remained until the spring rains washed them into the ground; every cow was sprinkled with ashes, like a mourner in the Old Testament, and their long, contemplative faces, thus oddly topped, stared out of barn doors and over barn-yard gates. Their forlorn looks, the gray surfaces of the gardens, and the little heaps of rubbish burning with thin flames, like sacrificial fires, gave the district a penitential air; but the ceremony was really prophylactic. No worm, no insect, no tiny malignant egg was expected to survive the ashes of Ash Wednesday; and when one did persist, it was considered accidental.

Jesse, following Antony to the barn on that day, relished the antithesis. "Twenty-four hours makes a difference. Yesterday being Shrove Tuesday, every housekeeper was baking fat-cakes; in the kitchens one could not make one's self heard for the frying. To-day the Thal is in expiatory get-up; and here we go, to ash the cattle, which do not desire it."

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No answer was expected from Antony. He had a bucket of ashes swinging from each hand, his heavy, regular step sounded as undivertible as the march of events, and his back looked preoccupied; so Jesse said no more. Allowing his shoulders to sag under his own burden of buckets, he followed, thinking: "I wonder how the cows explain this to themselves. I should resent it if I were a cow."

The victims were standing about the yard in the wooden attitudes peculiar to them, each with the deliberately imperceptive expression of a sage under his own Bo-tree, except one Jersey, which was walking round and round a haystack to which repeated perambulations had given thatched eaves like a cottage, at the height of a tall cow's back. Jesse detained her, sprinkled her copiously, and enjoyed her lady-like disgust at the liberty. When every cow had been treated with the same cosmetic, he observed: "I wish that we were done with that Holstein bull. He is in the worst of humors to-day."

"He will make no trouble," said Antony, leading the way into the barn.

The Holstein bull was alone there, stately and misanthropical; he objected to the intrusion upon his privacy. He glared over his shoulder at the sound of steps, roared briefly, and made a clumsy plunge. His stall was too narrow to permit him to turn and charge, but he tried hard, and his chain clanked and the partition shook.

"Here," said Antony. Catching one horn, he slowly sprinkled ashes over the broad black back. The bull failed to free his head, rumbled, and was quiet.

"By my soul, they look alike," thought Jesse. "Big and powerful and black!"—"Antony," he said, "I believe that you are the strongest man in the township."

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“I am,” said Antony, without interest.

At that moment, transformed by self-forgetting admiration, Jesse resembled Antony as little as possible. “There is a man for you!” he thought. “I should have said that there was no woman to match him, but lately it seems that there is one.”

He was so much pleased that he surveyed the barn, when he emerged from it, with a continuity of approval. It deserved respect: the blue limestone had been quarried from the hills among which it stood; the screening willows were there by the foresight of a pioneer; the red roof was a mark to far-flying pigeons at sunset, and a flock of them, white and gray like little February clouds, were fluttering about it now, and saying to each other: “Ho-ome! Ho-ome!” Reading the date cut in the front wall, he thought: “Father built it the year he married. It is a palace for the cows.”

He liked the fulfilment of an ideal, even a bovine one; he liked to let the work wait while he looked over the Thal and noted the attenuated columns of smoke rising like exclamation-points from the tenant-farms, beside his father’s house the accumulation of his mother’s labors burning vigorously, Esther in the garden, and the harmony with the day of the worn snow and dull sky. He reflected.

“How religious we appear! Those oblongs covered with gray, as if it had snowed ashes in regular spots, must surprise the birds which fly over us. And if any worm works out his head from under that blanket which Esther is putting on our garden, he deserves free board. What might be wrong with Esther?”

There was a Millet-like sadness about her as she went back and forth, back and forth, in the white February afternoon, scattering with a pastoral gesture those too

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symbolic ashes on the snow. It seemed to her brother that she grew more dejected as he watched. Considering her like a problem, he called in as consultant Antony, who reappeared just then.

“See Esther.”

“What about her?”

“What do you think ails her?”

“I make out nothing unusual. Did she tell you that something is wrong?”

“No; but have you not noticed how low-spirited she is of late? And how sadly she walks!”

Antony looked, pushed the subject out of existence with a movement of one shoulder, and started away; but Jesse, who had been ready since his babyhood to share with this brother, must now share an interesting idea.

“Wait. I know what it is.”

“Then why did you say you did not know?”

“I did not say I did not know; I said she did not tell me. Two things could not be more different. She is distressed because Bertha is here.”

“Does she dislike Bertha?”

“I think not; but who will notice Esther now?”

“I know of no one whom she could want; but if there were, I think she need not be afraid.”

“What about Saul?”

“Her cousin!”

“I tell you she has reason for alarm. Have you not seen this Bertha? I saw her once, months ago (she was walking on the road over the mountain), and do you think I forgot it? I cannot say what it is about her—she is not so extraordinarily handsome—but I believe that she is as strong for a woman as you are for a man.”

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“What do you want a woman for? To handle your grain-sacks?”

“I believe that if she took the pins out of her hair it would come to her knees, and ripple like ripe wheat in the wind; and it is just the wheat’s color. Ah!”

“You must be interested yourself,” said Antony, contemptuously.

“Oh no! I have girls enough,” Jesse answered; but as he laughed he watched Antony under his lashes. His suspicions fluttered like a swarm of little butterflies, always ready to alight upon the emotions of other people; and with a sense of delayed discovery, he ceased to watch when Antony said:

“Shall we play to-night? We have not had a game for nearly two weeks.”

“I suppose Bertha will go to bed early, as father tells her to do. What care he takes of her! Then we might play, unless mother has burned our cards. Father hid them the last time, and she always finds them when he does it.”

“That makes no difference. I have two new packs.”

By producing them at an early hour in the evening, Antony put an end to the virtuous triumph of his mother when the old ones were not to be found in the clock. The company in the kitchen divided. Saul was absorbed in preparation for his next day’s work, bending over a pile of school-books his long, fresh-colored face, which would have made a good subject for a *Portrait of a Young Philosopher*, with the wainscoting as background. To the same table Susanna, with her Bible and her mending-basket, ostentatiously retired, abandoning on the other side of the room the four worldlings and their vain pleas-

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ures. When the family played she always read the Bible as an antidote.

They were not cast down by it; they had their own lamp on the dresser, where the satiny side of J. H.'s mug made a benevolent bright spot. Job and Jesse, sitting in the track of the light, opposed Antony and Esther in the shadow. They played hard. When the game had gone on long enough to produce in Susanna a mood of disapprobation and misgiving that concerned itself with "old, unhappy, far-off things," her sad voice interrupted a silence full of computations.

"Jonathan is so far away!"

At that moment Antony had perceived a chance to euchre his pre-eminent father; so it was good of him to say, "Jonathan will be here before long." Then he was lost in the game again; and Jesse remarked, as if he were stating something extraordinary, "Mother can never be reconciled to having him away."

"I know he will come back soon, but not to stay," said Susanna to Saul, who, not being a born member of the family, had more piquancy as a listener.

Saul politely looked up.

"No one knows how a mother misses her children; when the night comes she needs them all around her. I wanted him to be a preacher, and I wanted him to have what he wanted, but I was never willing to have him go."

"He will soon be ready for a charge," suggested Saul. "Perhaps he will have one near here, and will be able to live at home. And when we see him standing up to preach we shall all be proud of him. He will make a fine-looking minister."

"Saul, you are a good diplomatist," Jesse put in. "Mother

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mourns because Jonathan is not here, and you do not say that it is better so, like most comforters; you make her forget it with a pleasant idea."

"I cannot forget it," said Susanna, seriously.

"Mother says that she cannot forget it. Is there anything, then, that any one cannot forget?"

Saul withdrew to his book. Job's terminating voice uttered: "I dislike to hear any one say that he cannot." Jesse rolled his eyes from face to face, and played a decisive card. Susanna recommenced:

"You are right, Saul. When I see him in the pulpit! He is no common man, my son Jonathan. Your uncle also has been so set on making him a preacher that if anything happened to prevent it now, I believe he could not stand up under it."

Her nephew's diversion was successful. Now she was happy until the end of the game, wandering among maternal anticipations for Jonathan, who profited by the double charm of absence and achievement; but when the score was under discussion she implied her opinion of the pastime by saying, in a clear, didactic tone, as she rose and prepared to go:

"If Esther would take a lesson in English from Saul, who is always willing to give one, it would be a better use of the time."

As Esther meekly took the vacated seat under the lamp, Jesse, with the acute smile of intelligence flattered by corroboration, marched off ostentatiously with a candle. Antony was laughing with his father.

"You cannot persuade me that your luck is honest. I believe that you have a witch in the shape of a black cat to tell you what to play, and of course you get the better of

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your innocent children." He looked back from the doorway, his eyes luminously merry.

"Very well. To-morrow night you shall have a chance to get the better of me and the witch. Oh, your mother has already gone! Saul, do not keep Esther up late. Good-night." Job disappeared into the bedroom next the kitchen, the traditional apartment of the master and mistress.

The silence which settled upon the room after these spirited departures developed the nocturnal quality, in which it seemed as if a human voice or movement would disturb presences alien to the day, and probably malevolent. That silence, which makes any companionship unusually significant, brought Esther no peaceful release from demands, for she was under an apprehension so heavy that it seemed not to be within her, but to overshadow her corporeally. It wore her out; she was just able to sit still, not able to protect herself, even by the simple defence of moving the lamp to Saul's side of the table; so she remained in the full light, where he could see her face if he happened to wish to see it, while she went stumbling over linguistic difficulties which added themselves to the general difficulties of life.

His teaching habit asserted itself so successfully that he did not show how much he also was aware of the nocturnal mystery, and the pity which he felt for her heavy eyes and the exhausted carriage of her head and shoulders was concealed when he said, "You are not interested in this. Perhaps you do not care to learn English."

"I see no use in it."

"It is the language of Shakespeare," said he. "That was Shakespeare that you were reading."

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Reproach and the necessity for Shakespeare together were too much for Esther, who drooped still more.

“Here is something for you from the post-office.”

As she opened the envelope, which was decorated with a stamped pattern, and discovered a lace-edged sheet with a forget-me-not garland and most ornamental script, her face actually freshened. She looked to him to read it; and he said, with the encouraging manner of an uncle: “Continue the lesson with this. Perhaps it will go better”:

“*To my Valentine:*

The small dark rose that seldom blooms,
The violet wet with dew,
The honey and the honeycomb
Are not so sweet as you.’

That is beautiful: ‘The honey and the honeycomb.’ That comes out of the Bible. What rose do you think it means?”

“Perhaps the little one, almost black, that grows by the spring-house. Go on.”

“The shortest month of all the year
Is all that I may claim,
For which a life were all too brief,
The singing of your name.’

What does that mean?”

“February, in which comes Valentine’s Day, is the shortest month of the year, but this writer would like to praise you all the time.”

“It is much prettier than what you gave me to read before:

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“Though I too poor and humble be
To ask you to be mine,
Let me, this one short day, delight
To be your valentine.”

Don’t you think that it is very pretty, Saul?”

“It is very poor poetry. See how he uses *all* three times in three lines. That is very bad.”

Esther laid down the paper, with sympathy for it because it could not be admired, and leaned her chin on her hand.

When the pause had lasted too long, Saul asked, “Can you not guess who sent it?”

“No.”

“Are you so tired, Esther?”

“Not very.”

“Will you read the valentine again—for the practice?”

“It is late.”

The intimacy of the single lamp became more and more exigent; something must be said in reply to his interrogative eyes. She did say, “It is hard to live, Cousin Saul,” and found the words a relief, though she did not expect him to understand them.

“It is. Esther, did the valentine offend you? It is not very nice, but I thought you might be pleased because it is like the one your father sent to your mother.”

“Did you send it? Oh! When you criticised it, I thought you had not!”

“And you did not care for it then?”

“No, I did not care for it then.”

Both stopped for a minute, seeing light. To her it was sunlight, and her instantaneous response, in the form of a touching physical readiness, was clearer than words. To

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him the light was a destroying flash that burned away all his defences; they had been in use so long that he had become unworthily acquiescent to a painful lot, but they were done for now.

“Esther, I dare say nothing!” It was the adult equivalent of a cry.

Her eyes waited upon his with sweet compliance, agreeing to postpone happiness if he saw a reason for doing so. It was grievous to dim that look.

“I have thought of you since I was a boy and first came here to live. I have stayed here because to see you and talk to you was better than anything that I could get out of the world. Now—I must go.”

“Saul! You will go away?”

“Can I stay here and say nothing? Can I see you, day in and day out, and endure not to have you to myself? Indeed, I must go quickly.”

She made her resolution visibly. “Rather than have you leave me, I will say what does not become me. As I have been in your mind, so you have been in mine. I did not recognize you for what you are to me until this stranger came, and I thought that you must surely turn to her. Oh, I don’t know how I have gotten through these last few days!”

He did not even notice the mention of the other woman. “Esther, can you say that as I feel for you, so you feel for me?”

“Yes, Saul. Full as much, and full as long.”

After the first kiss, which they had so often imagined, his cheek was against her hair, and the world went whirling on without them as they breathed together. It was a moment of compensation, but a moment only; it might not last, lest they should be as gods.

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He was the first to feel their obligations, which she could have ignored forever. "Esther," he said, "I have done you wrong."

"No, I am sure."

Her determination to snatch at happiness that she might present it to him was coercive; he had to guard her. He walked through the room with a drawn lip, and she, like other women, waited.

"I have nothing to offer you; I have no business, no prospects in life, no home but this. I could be proud to be silent until I could say, 'Here is a home for the two of us, come into it,' but how can I say, 'Leave every one you love, turn your back on your father and your father's house, and come to me?'"

"We can make a home. Why should I turn my back upon my father's house? I will give up neither him nor you. I will wait, and when you are ready, here you shall find me."

"Do you forget—that we are cousins?"

"What do we care?"

For a sick minute he wondered at his own condemnation—to contend simultaneously with circumstances and himself and her. "Has any other man gone through this?" he thought. "I must end it, or she will make herself cheap in her own eyes."

Esther, left at the stage of the last speech, made light of these flimsy deterrents in the strength of her own secure heart.

He was unable to look at her, and with difficulty he said the words: "I can do no more; but you shall make no promises that you might regret, my little dark rose."

She listened tolerantly; and with a smile that was half

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motherly, and made his words the pessimism of a child, she walked over to him, and laid her hand upon his cheek, and said: "Dear Saul! Dear Saul!"

The door opened, and Job surveyed them. From the black oblong behind him they heard the sleepy breathing of Susanna.

"I thought that I would come to see why you kept her up so late," he said, and all his words had cutting edges. "Esther, leave your cousin and go to your bed."

She made a movement which might easily have become recusant, but Saul's eyes enforced the command. Already they needed no words between them, and she replied with a plighting look, and quietly departed. Her presence could not have given Saul so much spirit for the interview as did that look, and he stood with dignity through the silence which followed.

Job, who had felt the need of much self-control, had by this time attained it sufficiently to proceed. "Now I am ready to hear what you have to say. Can you make this appear right in my sister's son?"

It was incapacitating to have to plead his case as if its flagrancy were so open as to need no statement; but Saul replied, bravely: "I can, uncle. I love Esther as a wife."

"That I believe. I do not think so badly of you as to suppose that you tamper with her, and she is a girl for any man to love."

"And she looks to me as to a husband."

"There is the serious matter. I ask you what will come of it. Shall she, loving you, go to another man, or shall she spend her life alone? How is it, Saul?"

"I beseech you to give your consent."

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“In no circumstances.”

It was now a more even contest between them, and Saul continued, with greater ease:

“Uncle, although I have thought of no woman but Esther, I had no hope at all. I chose to stay here, in her presence, until she married another man, as the best thing that I could do in life. Now, within this hour, I find that she feels much for me. As yet, I have asked her nothing.”

“What could you ask of her? Have you money?”

“You know what was left me.”

“Have you a home?”

“I will have one.”

“Can you undo your relationship?”

“No; but I want her, cousin or no cousin; and all men do not think alike about that. If I were not a relative, uncle, would you still oppose me?”

The memory of the sister to whom he had been counsellor before her marriage with Saul’s father delayed the answer and softened it, as Job tried to follow through befogging emotions the straight way of justice.

“You have my sympathy. You are a good boy—an earnest, considerate fellow; but for too many years you have been contented to stay here, working in the summer for a laborer’s pay, and in the winter teaching this country school. You have good health, you have an education, but you make no effort to get on. You are like your father, who left you less than his inheritance. I could not feel satisfied that Esther would be taken care of by a man who has no honest ambition.”

Saul listened with acquiescent gravity to his uncle repeating the accusation of his own thoughts.

“If I go away at once, asking no promise of her, and

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she is still here when I am able to prove to you that I can take care of her, then what?"

"Still you would be cousins. That you cannot get over. Nor can you make me feel confidence enough in you to give her to you. This must end here, Saul."

"I will go—"

"At present you will not go! If you leave before the term is over, questions will be asked, and she may be talked of. You will stay here until your school is closed; then you can go where you please, and every one will hear that you have work elsewhere, and until then I will send Esther away. And I will take your promise to say no more to her, and I hope she will not think too long of this. She is still young."

Saul looked as if he had been thrust out into bleak weather. "You give me no chance. I ask no consideration from you, but Esther herself should be consulted."

"Do I need you to tell me how to look out for my daughter? What have you already done for her?"

The momentum of his overt passion hurried Saul along. Feeling that that passion was its own excuse, he assumed no servile attitude; the mere idea of excusing it covered his face with red like the red of anger, and his energy counterbalanced Job's calm weight.

"You say a hard thing. Now it is right that you listen to me. I think that there is no man like you, uncle. I can never forget what you have done for me, but it is not that, it is yourself that I admire; and I would willingly do nothing to displease you. As for the present, I will do as you direct. I will say no more to Esther, I will stay until you leave me free to go, and then I will go. I want you to know that I do not do this because I am poor, or because we are cousins;

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I do it because you are right in saying that I have not proved that I can take care of her. But when I have proved it, I will come back. I will put it before her, and as she decides, so it will be."

It was a sad moment for both.

"You have been among my sons as one of them," said Job, "and now you would lead away my daughter. Then I must see to her."

"So it will be."

III

A DAY OF DOUBT FOR JONATHAN

AN anxious young man tramped up and down in front of the organist's house, and neither went in at the door nor out at the gate. When he heard wheels, which was often, for the congregation of St. John's was gathering for the morning service, he exhibited mutually exclusive desires: to know who was arriving and not to be seen himself; and when carriages passed the house, dignity visibly arrested the recurrent impulse to dodge behind the arbor-vitæ trees. His difficulties were too preoccupying to permit him to be soothed by the Sunday morning hush upon the country, the thin sunshine and thin shadow through which he walked, and the soft voice of the wind, sweeping across him through the intermittent protection of the same trees. That wind carried the sound of the church-bell miles away to the Heiligthal, and the Thal and the bell were connected in his contending thoughts.

He was a personable, dark young man. In his face were possibilities of spiritual distinction of an ascetic kind which did not harmonize with his conspicuous physical qualities; and it was a question what calling could exhaust potentialities so eager and so diverse, which would probably create for him the situation from which Saint Anthony got most credit. For the present he had a theological air, and

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he looked worn. Jesse Heilig would have resembled him had Jesse developed his unlikeness to his brother Antony.

When the Rev. Philip Heilig, the pastor of St. John's, came driving up to the gate, the young man presented himself with a countenance in which perturbation had increased. His appearance caused surprise.

"Jonathan, what brings you here? Has anything happened?"

"Nothing has happened yet. I have not been at home. I came this morning, straight here, because I wanted to see you first, uncle. I can continue in this way no longer."

The minister bent his head slightly, in grave, unwilling acquiescence, his eyes thoughtfully lowered. "Then I suppose you have decided."

"Not altogether," Jonathan admitted.

"Not? Then why do you come to take a definite step?"

"I must settle it. I cannot dodge the fact that I am not satisfied; and if I change, I cannot change too soon."

By an interrogative look, withheld until he had stepped out of the carriage and through the gate, the older man implied the inadequacy of this explanation. Jonathan was not ready with a better one, and it was plain enough from his face that the long argument with himself which had already marked it was setting in again. Presently he gave himself a liberating shake.

"You said yourself, uncle, in one of your letters since I began to hesitate, that this calling requires the whole heart. That I cannot give it. I want to be in the fields, ploughing and harvesting. Why, look at me!" He threw out his hand in an appeal for justice to the physical make-up which had its needs and uses.

"Go there, then. Come back, and work on the farm a

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while. I think you will soon be glad that you have not done what you must abide by."

"No, uncle; no more deferring. I am here to decide. Feeling as I do now, my study of divinity is the worst of cant; it is profanation. I will be sincere in it, or I will leave it for good."

The minister smoothed his small, grizzled beard with a gesture like Job's, and asked, after deliberation, "Have you thought of your father?"

"Much. I know that he is set upon my preaching, and if I change he will take it hard. He may think that I am acting the fool. Perhaps, indeed, I should do well enough?" The sentence broke in uncertainty.

"Is not his wish a reason for sticking to it? You may place confidence in your father's judgment."

"His wish is a reason, yes; but a man must decide for himself, according to what he knows of himself. Certainly, if anything is his, it is his integrity," answered Jonathan, stiffening instantly at the suggestion of subordination.

The minister was struck anew by the spectacle of Youth—a sight which always evoked his charity. He said, rather ceremoniously: "It is high time for me to go into church. You come too, and sit with me. Certainly you need take no action until after service. Think it over well."

Jonathan obeyed. It was but a few minutes since his uncle had arrived, but it was a long time in his history, and he had to achieve composure. The calm reception of his announcement had diminished his own idea of its importance; and as he went through the churchyard, avoiding the admiring glances of the congregation, and took for the first time the visiting clergyman's chair, he was aware, as the minister had intended he should be, of

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a mental position equally new, from which he must carefully think his way. The church was one of the large country edifices accommodating many hundreds of worshippers which are equally important in the landscape and in the life of the parish. It had been a part of his life; he had been taken to the dedication when he was a very little boy. The cold walls, made no more amenable by the crudely colored windows; the uncomfortable pews; the rampart-like Bible, with gorgeous bookmarks depending—all were just as they had been while he grew up: on all those Sundays light had fallen upon the rows and rows of robust country faces as it was falling now. In his state of mind it was easier to remember than to see who was actually before him; but presently he distinguished an uncle and aunt, Elias and Cassandra Heilig, the one surveying him with almost paternal satisfaction, the other with an air of not telling the worst, which was as far as she usually went toward affability. Then Uncle Heman and Aunt Henrietta Geiger became perceptible. She smiled at him so delightedly that he smiled back at her, and she could scarcely refrain from attracting the attention of her sister Susanna by a demonstration of pride. Susanna, draped in the purple gown of Esther's selection, made with many complications of trimming, with prosperous head-gear and a long gold chain, was a stately spectacle as she proceeded up the aisle. Jonathan could see that his unexpected appearance gave her a real shock; but her manner did not falter for a second, and she seated herself alone in the Heilig pew, where he was accustomed to sit with her, with the air of a queen-mother beholding for the first time her son enthroned. He knew what she felt—knew so well that by the time he looked on to his father, Job had taken

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his place among the elders, and was receiving their felicitations, conveyed in a nod or a gutteral whisper. When the eyes of the father and son met, Jonathan felt a thrill. There was a degree of happiness apparent in the bright, blue-gray eyes and in the lips, proudly shut lest they express too much, which gave him a new light upon paternal feeling, and which he was deeply proud to cause. And this was what he was about to frustrate!

As the service went on, and he perceived his brother Jesse in the choir, his brother Antony in the gallery, and recognized, one after another, the friendly people who were ready to receive him heartily, he had to be happy. "Compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses," he thought; and the sense of being on trial made him want to work for approbation immediately and hard. There was time to recall some of the many things which he had meant to say to such people as these when he should be authorized to assist them, and the changes he had hoped to make in certain lives; plenty of time, too, for his father's feelings to become clearer and clearer to him, as he pondered them during the singing. He could not know them fully, being cut off by the unbridged gap of time: he could not know that the sight of him in that honorable position restored to Job the sense of sublime agreement with his purposes, which had been lost to him since Esther's straying on Ash Wednesday; nor Job's sympathy, which he himself felt to be presumptuous in a mortal, with the divine paternity, that charged the phrases, "*von dem Vater—geboren—eines Wesens mit dem Vater*," with an incommunicable meaning. In the prayer of a pastoral people they were nearer. These descendants of tilling generations did not pray as a matter of form: "*Behüte*

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uns gnädig vor Pestilenz und schädlicher Seuche an Menschen und Vieh, vor Feuers-und Wassersnoth, vor Hagel und Ungewitter, vor Misswachs und theurer Zeit." Here the younger man, drawn back to the land by impulses centuries old, felt more than Job—more still, as the sermon corroborated those bequeathed desires, for it chanced to be on the text, "The strength of the hills is His also."

The minister regretted that text on account of his special auditor. Aware that too much had been felt in the course of the morning for ordinary greetings and conversations to follow easily, he turned from pronouncing the benediction to his immediate duty with Jonathan, and said, "Go out by the side-door, and wait for me at the organist's house"; and when the young man had gratefully disappeared, he supplied the explanations which the relatives in a body required. A family dinner was in prospect, and they all were so eager that he and Jonathan should appear at it that their urgency made them the last of the congregation to leave. After expediting the most disappointed departure, the minister started down through the graveyard; Jonathan came to meet him, and the two tall men began to walk up and down.

It could have been seen from afar that they were in serious debate by a deprecatory or emphatic gesture, and the carriage of their gravely bent heads; but there was no one to see except the organist's little girl, in her plaid Sunday dress, who came running out to greet the minister, and did not venture to go near. They seldom raised their eyes from the ground, and passed and repassed the rows of white, monotonous gravestones as indifferently as those who were commemorated might have passed, after the years through which they had been blown over by winds

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from the four quarters. The red church was appropriately near, being a third in the discussion—a calamity for Jonathan to avoid, and a goal for the minister, who referred to it by glances, as to a witness.

Toward the end he said: “You were so enthusiastic about your calling!”

Jonathan’s oppressed look replied; his words, which seemed to surprise himself, were no plainer. “I was; but that exaltation is all gone. When I think of myself in the ministry, it is like looking down a gloomy road with nothing at the end.”

“Are you sure that you do not mistake a whim for a serious desire? Remember how long you have aimed at this, and all your hopes. Will you let them go for nothing?” He paused to give this consideration time to complete its effect; and continued, after a corroborative silence from his hearer: “Remember also the influence upon your brothers and your sister if they see you take this way. Independent principles are wonderfully contagious.”

“They are not in my position.”

“And this integrity of yours—has it occurred to you that you make your father pay for it?”

“I am trying to act like an honest man, uncle. I dare not think of father too much, or I may not be able to see what in my case is honest. If it were not for him, my decision would be made. He complicates it doubly, because I know very well his wishes for me, and at the same time it is he whom I want to emulate, and a place in the world like his that I want to reach.”

“Then by all means consult him. Don’t be too quick to make your leap. Come now, and eat with me at the

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organist's, and then go home and lay it before him. No man can advise you better than he."

Jonathan obeyed again; and in an hour he had started upon his walk home, finding the exhilaration of reprieve in the thought, "Now I shall forget all this until I tell it to father."

The fresh, damp wind which continually swooped around him, and the signs of advancing spring on the farms, added to his sufficing happiness. He enjoyed criticising premises and prognosticating crops in successive fields; as he went by Saul's school-house, he felt particularly free. Beyond it flowed the stream which turned Jesse's mill-wheels, now only a mile distant; and he stopped on the bridge to watch the water, which was higher than usual, and bore a large responsibility of brown foam and dead leaves. By the time the road began to wind around the Himmelberg, he had only fragments of thoughts, as painless as those leaves.

The mountain was the Thal's southern boundary, and the space between it and the high ground to the west was not much more than wide enough for the road, which made its way through a velvety band of cedar-trees, with dropping berries that kept the robins there all winter. Before the traveller, who had come so far, the prospect of the Thal expanded. So sequestered was the garden-like enclosure between the mountains at each end and lateral walls of high ground that it seemed as if it should, like a Greek valley, have developed an individual civilization, with its own wars and poets. The whole extent was occupied by Job Heilig's farm and tenant-farms: two large red barns, embellished with suns, moons, and stars, were conspicuous at the north end and the south; and from the centre the fine stone group of house, barn, and mill so dominated the scene that the

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winding creek appeared to converge there instead of flowing by. In the transient March sunlight the water had a steel-like shine. There were streaks of new grass, and dandelions under the fences, and the fields looked docile, but the first green haze had yet to appear on the cold trees which covered the Himmelberg to its remote top. The Himmelberg, which was the highest point in the county, was a rotund peak, and lacked the majesty of the Blaueberg, the splendid gray sweep of which closed the Thal on the north, and ran straight as a ruler east and west. It had the charm of mists driving along its ridge, and it was the scene of incomplete tales, of adventures on difficult and lonely roads, of wildcats that dropped from branches, travellers with heavy purses who went up and did not come down, and spots, by a conspicuous tree or stone, which spirit-seeing horses passed unwillingly at night. It looked as if much good or bad might come down from it, and it made the Thal-dwellers raise their eyes. To Jonathan, coming home implied return to it as much as return to his father's house. He looked at the beloved spot with eyes more passionate than they had yet been for any human being, and said to himself: "I must stay here. It is here that I shall have a happy life."

Not expecting to find any one at home, he went leisurely around the house and past all the blank windows, through which no faces looked except the faces of the flowers blooming behind them. It was three o'clock, the ghostly time when the day which has had its climax pauses before moving down to darkness and termination. The hush peculiar to the hour prevailed; the sunshine was too pale to be discordant with it. A voice began to sing—a low, lonely-sounding voice:

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*“Liebe, die mich hat gebunden
An ihr Foch mit Leib und Sinn;
Liebe, die mich überwunden
Und mein Herze hat dahin:
Liebe, dir ergeb ich mich,
Dein zu bleiben ewiglich.”*

“That must be Bertha, about whom they wrote to me,” he thought.

Some one crossed the floor, and looked over the geraniums to see who knocked. He observed that her hair waved up from her forehead and shaded it. Then she opened the door, and he did not know what to say to her.

“Good-day,” she said, in a soft, abrupt way.

“I am Jonathan Heilig,” he replied, resorting to a statement of facts. “Have any of them come back?”

“Not yet.”

She stood back humbly to let him enter, and moved to shut the door after him, but he had learned in his years away to take care of women, so he did that himself, and waited for her to sit. After hesitation she did sit, and with the evident purpose of removing them from his attention, she closed two little cases which were standing on the table. He saw that they were daguerrotype-cases—she must have been singing to herself, with them beside her for company. He continued to look at her, and she underwent his look without response, and without relaxing the bearing, which she had assumed, of a servant in the presence of her master’s son; but she had an expression of detachment, and he could not promise himself that his opinion of her would interest her much.

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Desiring to say something, he again fell back upon a fact: "I am glad to be at home."

She replied by a slight smile, and her eyes were immediately lowered again. He was sure that she had selected this out of an abundance of possible replies.

"They write me that Saul Gantner has decided to go away," he persisted. "The family is changing. You have come and I have come, and he is about to go."

"Yes, I believe so."

Her manner was so gentle that it made even this brevity soft; her grave face looked mobile enough for a wide range of expression, and he wished to see it change.

"I am glad to come home to the hills," he said, choosing the subject in compliance with a whim that might have been Jesse's.

The choice was successful; the grave face lighted, and she did not look so handmaidenlike.

"It is hard to be away from them. When I was a little girl I looked south to the Blaueberg, and thought that it was the end of the world."

He wanted so much to have her continue that he was disappointed unreasonably when she stopped. There was quite a long silence, across which Susanna's clock went ticking on. That clock, which had afforded faithful service to generations before Jonathan, marking unconcernedly the moments of death and birth, and changing its aspect for nothing nearer than the moon, was a steady companion.

"It is a good old friend. Were you sitting alone with it?" he asked, indicating his subject by a smiling glance.

"Yes. It is a good friend. Our old clock was like a part of the family. It seems that it, and anything that

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we have lived with for a long time, must have feelings of its own."

There was another pause, during which, as Jonathan looked at the work-worn hands which lay in self-controlled quiet in her lap, and again at her face, an impulse took possession of him to go at once and see all his family. Not only was he more aware than usual of warm attachment to them; he was also conscious, as by a flood of fresh light from an unknown quarter, of greatly increased power to appreciate duties and human relations and affections. His mind had never felt so capable, and he was sure that by the time he had walked the two miles to his aunt's house he would know how he ought to decide. It was of no use to wait—cowardly, rather.

"I shall walk over to my aunt's," he announced.

He left abruptly, and started away on the road that led to a new goal. He was under the hallucination that he was now about to decide, and that the decision would be made by him, free and independent.

IV

JONATHAN ANNOUNCES A DECISION

HENRIETTA GEIGER'S friends generally began, as they approached her house, the self-congratulation induced by recalling her career, which was a succession of frivolous choices. At the time when she light-heartedly married beneath her, this excuse for a house, with sagging walls and patches tinkered by himself, was the sole possession with which Heman backed his suit; and he had neither rebuilt it nor added acres to his inherited few. The one thing that he did multiply was children. They were so frequent—running out of doors, and riding up on colts, and sliding down from trees, when one was looking over the place to see how badly off Henny really was—that it was difficult to believe that there were only six of them, and her rosy cheeks seemed quite irrational. She never knew that she ought to be discontented; on the contrary; and she made the old place shine. One of the signs of spring in the neighborhood was her short, round figure clinging to a ladder like a woodpecker to a tree and whitewashing with vigorous sweeps. At the same time Heman was usually on the roof, painting it green, and a great deal of lively conversation went on. It was another scandal about Henny that she had been married for fifteen years, and had more to say to her husband now than had most court-

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ing couples; and the wonder was how Heman, who was a silent man, could stand it; but he actually seemed anxious to miss none of the remarks that came floating up to him while she whitewashed the gable. However, neither his devotion nor their embellishment of the old place could blind her friends. The dilapidation of the porch was not concealed by the honeysuckles, which now, in March, had already put out some infantile leaves; the lilac-bushes on both sides of the gate had the air of meaning to begin immediately upon their non-utilitarian sweetness, but the gate itself was hard to shut, because of having been much swung on; there were more flower-beds than were compatible with the duties of a woman who had gone into maternity so extensively; and Heman's fields, while they were in excellent order, were certainly not many. Noting these points, the chorus sighed, "Six children!"

The appearance of the couple was more than usually inappropriate to the circumstances attributed to them on the morning when they drove home from church at a profane pace, in order to be in time for their own dinner-party. Their shining sorrel had passed three other horses in the course of the four-mile drive, and was in the humor for a little conceited prancing; so Heman had to hold the reins in one hand and help Henny with the other to jump down over the wheel. He was a thin-mouthed, rather small man, but he seemed quite able to manage the sorrel with one hand. He wore drab clothes, with a good deal of cravat, and the wind surrounded her with a flutter of brick-colored silk skirts, so they were a gay-looking group in the sunny country road.

Encouraging odors were blown toward them from the house, and Heman displayed his quality as a husband in displaying ignorance of his wife's arrangements.

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“There seems to be some good cooking going on,” he said, with unauthoritative approval—not asking a question, but looking as if he would be pleased to know what the prospects were.

“Turkey and all that goes with it, and four kinds of pie. Esther is a good cook. Since she did not want to go to church, I went with an easy mind.”

“How many are coming?”

“Job and Susanna, and Cassandra and Ely, and Jesse. I asked Antony, and he wouldn’t come, and I asked Saul, and he wouldn’t come, and they gave no reasons; and I was really anxious to have the preacher and Jonathan, and you heard how that went.” Henny’s speech flowed like a pleasant liquor on the removal of the cork, and there was a temporary inflection about all her endings, as if the cork might be easily removed.

“Let them stay away if they feel like it. They miss an excellent dinner.”

“You don’t like my connections,” said she, deductively.

“If a man has succeeded in getting the flower of a family for himself, why should he worry about the others? Henrietta,” Heman looked all over the front of the house, comparing point for point of its decrepitude with luxuries which he purposed, “I know very well what they think of our living in this old place, that grandfather hewed the logs for, and with only four rooms in it; and you will not have to wait much longer. I was calculating in church, and if I do as well as usual, after two more trips West we can begin to build as we have talked about building. I am going to make a genuine fine country-place of it. I am going to have a terrace for your flower-beds. Then we shall see what the Heiligs have to say.”

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“You may be sure that I would not exchange my man in a four-roomed log-house for any Heilig in a stone house with twenty rooms. Not that I dislike the Heiligs; they are good men, and Job in particular makes my sister a good husband; and it is wonderful, the luck he has.”

“I can hardly stand the way they take the lead wherever they are. Ely I don’t mind so much, he is a fussy fellow, with his “Ja, ja,” and you need pay no attention to him; but Job thinks he is the great I Am; and now that Jonathan is so near to being a preacher, he thinks it more than ever.”

“It is fine to have one son a preacher. If one of ours—”

“Ours shall take the way they want to go, if it is a decent way; then we may reasonably expect them to continue in it. Job puts each one at what he selects—Antony on the farm, Jonathan at the divinity school, Jesse in the mill—and he looks for no word out of them. I am surprised that the boys stand it.”

“I think they are satisfied. They are all started well in life.”

“That may be, but they had no voice in the matter, and a young man will like his own poor way better than his father’s good way. Some day one of those boys will kick over a trace; and then perhaps their father will learn that he did not create the Heilighthal and all in it out of nothing. You observe what I tell you—Job Heilig has had good-fortune and his own way ever since he was born, until I believe he forgets that there are other ways; and there must come a certain proportion of ill-luck to a man, if not early, then late; and Job fairly invites it in his treatment of his children.”

“I believe you are right about the luck; that I have often

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noticed. However, let me go in and get ready for them; I don't want their misfortunes to begin with our dinner."

Heman answered in rather a growling voice, as if he thought of this grievance much oftener than he spoke of it. "How I hate to have them bring things here to eat and wear, as if I couldn't take care of my own children!"

Here the sorrel started of her own accord, and he had to get into the carriage with a dragging leap; but he checked the horse to listen to his wife's last remark.

"We can't object if they want to do it, and no one could think anything of that kind about you. Susanna and I had the best dresses in church to-day, and I believe mine cost more than hers."

Her soothing was so successful that he even waited to watch her into the house, and she managed to make her silken flounces praise him. She moved like a creature to whom motion is a condition of life; and judging from the decorations of the room into which the door abruptly opened, color was another of her conditions. This room, which was a subject of cominiseration from the female friends, because it was not a parlor, was rather like a rainbow shop, so full was it of small bright areas in the form of table-covers, scarfs, and cushions. Some of these were composed of patches laid regularly and flat, in others much ingenuity had been used to make the patches protrude in puffs and folds; several of the pieces had taken prizes at county fairs, and every one had its personality for Henny, their architect. Now all the colors lighted up together in the burst of sunshine which entered with her. There was a lighting up of faces too. It was plain that she was the only sun required by the spaniel-eyed twins, to whom a deputy-maternal sister had permitted the Sabbath diversion of Noah's ark under

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the table. They received her with curiously silent delight, and could scarcely be detached from her.

Jesse, who arrived almost immediately, stopped for a minute in the doorway to enjoy the sunniness. He and his aunt met like friends who have a strong community of interest; and as he sat down, with a well-satisfied twin on each knee, he had the air of welcoming conversation. Of a pressing crowd of questions the one which first reached her lips was, "How did you get here?"

"I rode. I had to talk to the organist after church, or I should have passed you."

"No, you wouldn't. Heman was driving the new sorrel, and nobody in the township passes her. Where are the rest?"

"Coming. Uncle Ely will arrive after a while: anybody in the township could pass him, I should say. Mother and father will soon be here. They are a little late because they drove home first."

"Is every one well?"

"You saw them all at church except Saul, and he is perfectly well."

Jesse was lounging in his chair, one arm around each twin, as if he were absorbed in enjoyment of the contact and easy position; but his eyes danced at his impatient aunt.

"Heavens!" she said, "you know what I want to know! Tell it."

"Where do you want me to begin?"

"I don't care, so long as you do begin."

"Very good. This is the latest bulletin from the Heilighthal: Father and mother look sober, and say nothing; especially they say nothing about Esther's coming home. Saul looks more sober still, and is going away as soon as

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school closes; he does not mention where. Antony says a little less than usual; he could not say much less and continue the ordinary business of life. As for Bertha, since whose coming we have all been upset and solemn and going to leave our homes, she is not expected to have anything to say, and she goes about her work and minds her own business, like a good, handsome girl. And she certainly works for three."

"Is that all?"

"That is all."

"What brings Jonathan home?"

"I don't know," said Jesse, with an air of exhausted fluency.

Henny meditated a minute. "Church-business, the minister said; and they would not come here for dinner. It must be particular business, to take him from the school so near his graduation, and make him hurry out of sight before any one had a chance to speak to him. He looked well in the pulpit. I was proud of him, and so was your mother."

"She was; and she had reason. Are not all her sons fine-looking men? They take after her family."

Henny went on, thoughtfully: "Esther is sent here, and Antony is unlike himself, and Saul is going, and Jonathan is returning—I suppose there is nothing wrong with you, the only other one?"

"Not so far as I know."

"Well, that's a comfort. It is certainly a strange thing that all these people suddenly behave inexplicably, and no one ventures to speak of it."

The two pairs of mobile black eyes dwelt upon each other with foreboding. "Something is rotten in the state of

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Denmark" would have expressed classically the message of the eyes. Then Henny contributed a piece of practical philosophy: "The people who take no interest in their neighbors—what have they to think of by day and night?"

Jesse replied only by a smiling droop of the lashes; he looked as if it would scarcely be possible to arouse him from his ease; but at the next question, "What do you think of this Bertha?" he leaned forward in his characteristic attitude of watchful interest, so that little Susanna was bent over in his arm. "Now you touch it: Bertha—Ah! Some one is coming."

The new arrivals were Cassandra and Elias, representatives of another side of life, the constraint of whose demeanor resulted from the conversation which had been occupying them for the last three miles; as they had not enough social experience to feel comfortable, when, after a critique of two people had been prolonged by argumentative pauses throughout a slow journey of that length, the end of the journey made the discussed ones their host and hostess. The discussion had been, as usual, initiated by Cassandra, who was aptly named, her characteristic attitude of mind being one of depressing prophecy. She was a well-built, handsome woman, and so fair that unfavorable prognostications concerning her dark-skinned, handsome connections by marriage came naturally to her mind. To-day, too, the appearance of Jonathan in the pupit had exalted the horn of the head of the family, while her husband had occupied only the position of uncle to the young celebrity. Therefore, as Elias propelled his world-weary white horse through the sunny quiet of the country noon, many things had wrought within her, and she had remarked, with a sad

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movement of her bonnet, "It goes against me, this time and all times, to eat at Henrietta Geiger's."

"Why?" inquired Elias, apprehensively. "Is she no clean cook?"

"That I do not speak of. That I say of no woman unless I am driven to it; I will take away no woman's reputation. Though there she is, with her house to keep—it has but the four rooms, but no house keeps itself—and those six children; and yet look at the time she spends fixing up that room of hers, that is not even a parlor, until it resembles a fancy stall at an ice-cream festival! And she told me herself that she has not an extra comfort in the house; she even gave all her share of her mother's bedding to Susanna, because storing them up makes work. And she is always driving around the country with Heman! So I leave it to any one to say if she, taking time to do all that, can be as particular as she ought to be in her house, and whether she is not more likely to cleanse the outside of the cup and platter. But that is not what I started to say. You interrupt me so, Ely!"

"Well, there is plenty of time. Say it now. Then I hear two things instead of one."

"If I go to a meal at Henrietta Geiger's, I think with every bite I take, 'This is out of the mouths of those six young children.'"

"My opinion is that you need not worry about that. While it is a fact that Heman Geiger has not much money invested in his place, and not much in any bank in these parts, so far as we hear, there are other banks. Perhaps he is drawing big interest in the West. Besides, Cassandra, you must bear in mind, when you do your worrying, that one cannot say how much invested money Heman has in

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his barn at the very time when you are doing it. He makes more trips West in a year than any other stock-dealer of my acquaintance, and in these last six months he has bought and sold two horses and one bull that surpassed anything you ever saw for beauty. He made something on those three deals. I am really anxious to see what he has lately brought back. He had a new sorrel hitched this morning that looks of some account; before I could examine her she was away up the pike."

"The mare is not the only sorrel in the team," said Cassandra, bitterly, "and it is, indeed, unnecessary for me to worry about children whose mother showed no judgment in the first place, and now leaves them without an extra quilt if it turns cold, while she dresses up in a brick-colored silk dress with flounces and ruffles in every direction. I have nothing to say if Susanna dresses; every one knows that your brother can well afford it; but I do not see how Henny can say her prayers at night. You would think to look at her that she was no more than twenty-five. I believe it comes from being an old maid when she was married—she was full thirty—she had settled down to be young."

Having heard Henny commented upon before, Elias did not discontinue his speculative contemplation of the barn, momentarily nearer, which housed such interesting possibilities; but his attention was recalled by his wife's next remark: "And I have my suspicions."

"Of what?"

"Of *him*."

"Ach!"

"Oh yes! Just now you said that Heman Geiger goes West oftener than any other stock-dealer you ever heard

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of. Can you say where he goes? And see how he gets himself up, in what showy clothes, at his age and with gray hairs."

This new conception of Heman, with little, fleshy-lidded eyes and uninterested bearing, as a Don Juan, was so confusing to Elias that, although loyally eager to defend a brother-man from female impugnment, he could think of nothing more to say than another contemptuous "Ach!" With his pleasure in the prospect of the family gathering much diminished, he stopped the horse for Cassandra to descend at the gate—he would have considered it youthful folly to help her out, as long as she was not infirm—and then drove off, somewhat relieved, toward masculine society. Her expression, as she entered the house, was only a slight accentuation of her usual one; but Jesse, on the very point of the communication about Bertha, sauntered out of the room; the twins went up-stairs without being told, and Susanna, who arrived in a few minutes, was welcome as a mordant.

She received congratulations as the mother of Jonathan with no display of feeling other than civil gratitude, for she felt too much to speak of it; but her voice sounded warmer than usual as she asked to see the children, and her usual possessive air was intensified by abstraction. It was she who led the way to the large room where the whole six were quietly gathered, in the cut-up space left by four meagre-looking beds, and immediately the room was full of diverse sentiments. The critical looks of Aunt Cassandra antagonized the older children; they were caused by her reflection that those twins were certainly poor Henrietta's crowning indiscretion; and the twins themselves, scriptural stock-yard in hand, looked about for further refuge, antici-

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pating the appearance of Uncle Ely, who would want to show them how to play. However, as it was only aunts, they remained and submitted wordlessly and patiently to being kissed by Aunt Susanna, who always brought things. This time she produced from under her fur-lined dolman a box around which the small beneficiaries gathered to inspect the beautiful animal cakes with currant eyes; and little Susanna was drawn out of the circle of admirers, set upon a knee with fur-lined waves sweeping all around her, undressed, and dressed again in a truly delightful red frock that made her look like a hibiscus-flower. She fingered its ruffles in silent joy; but her mother, with a nervous look out of the window, thought: "I am glad that Heman is at the barn, and will not see it before dinner."

The state of Henny's own room, into which Susanna next led them, was strong evidence against Henny's house-keeping: both windows stood wide, and the blankets trailed scandalously over the floor. With a slow, inclusive, annotating glance, which delayed at the ruffles before it met the eyes, Cassandra inquired, "Do you always leave them open until noon?"

"Well, no, not always; but I had no time to make the bed before church, and a little cold hurts nothing. Indeed, I think it makes the children strong."

The glance went on, delaying at various points so significantly that a gleam appeared in Henny's bird-like eye, and changed after a second to a slight twinkle. "Oh, I think my floors are clean," she replied, to no speech. "It is quite hard to keep such things in mind, is it not? You know I was not brought up to be economical."

Cassandra looked ready for a sort of cold effervescence;

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and Susanna, fragmentary in her haste, put in, "Henny, that new silk quilt that you finished—"

There was an immediate change of base. The remoteness of the artist separated Henny from antagonisms, and Cassandra was moved from her position of aloofness by enthusiasm over the monumental work now disclosed to her. In quite a subdued voice she said: "Henny, this is certainly an extra one. How many pieces are in it?"

"Yes, this is an extra one. Eight hundred and fifty-two."

"You used many different fancy stitches," lauded Susanna, also solemnly.

"There are twelve patches, and the pieces in each patch are separated by a different stitch."

They gave it the praise of an expert examination: holding it off between their large, work-flattened fingers, to test color-contrasts, or lifting a corner to decipher the method of a stitch. Susanna was interested by a gray scrap with a small inwoven rosebud.

"That's a pretty piece," she said. "Where did I see that before?"

"On me. That dress I wore to your wedding, and I was proud of it. You will remember this better." Henny indicated a piece of changeable rose and green.

"Yes. That I wore to my wedding. Cassandra, do you remember this light-blue one? You had it for the same occasion, and you were the prettiest girl there. I noticed that, in spite of being excited about being married. I used to think it was too much that you had yellow curls when my hair was so black and would not curl, no matter what I did."

"You were a handsome girl, too," said Cassandra, quick

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to repay. "You always had the rosy cheeks that I wanted. Have you a piece of your wedding-dress, Henny?"

"This white with the pink stripe. I have yours, too, here in the middle. It is one of the prettiest silks in the quilt. When we wore those dresses, we thought that we knew what was before us."

All the much-used hands rested on the quilt, while the three women sat silently recalling events and dreams, which by their unreality had been made sweet or bitter. They had shared the events, and dreamed the dreams simultaneously: they looked at life from the same elevation.

"Marriage is a strange thing," said Cassandra.

"It is," said Susanna. "You marry your husband, thinking he is about the average; and then you find that there is no man like him."

Henny was struck by a perception which she could not express, that the real diversity of their three lots was in the temperaments important to them. The clearest thing that she could say—rising from under her share of the quilt—was: "We have different things to think over in connection with our men."

Each wife congratulated herself; it was a romantic moment for each.

For Cassandra it was the highest point of a day in which she had to play the minor part of critic of other people's climaxes. While the quilt was being put away she reflected how joyfully she would make one with even more pieces if she had a daughter like little Susanna to cherish it; and what she saw afterward caused the little daughter of her imagination to grow up suddenly, as she thought how tenderly she would have treated her when she was grown. The meeting of Susanna and Esther suggested

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this. Susanna's warmth was provisional, and Esther looked discouraged and said hardly anything. She went on slowly with her preparations for dinner, while the aunts inspected the table, which filled the room so full that they had to edge around it, and was itself so filled by the ornaments to a meal that the placing of the serious dishes would involve a process like mosaic-making.

Henny took a couple of slices of bread, and beckoned the others to come softly to the window. On the fence outside sat rows of sparrows, watchfully, in various stages of puffiness; and as she crumbled the bread and scattered it, the spot became an arena full of fighting, squeaking, snatching birds, over which she smiled like a goddess of sparrows.

"Aren't they like children?" she said, happily. "They wait for bread every day."

"And do you break up fresh slices for them every day?" Cassandra inquired.

"Oh yes. They have a hard time in the winter, poor little things! I always feel sorry when I see one dead on the ground. Here they sit and wait for me so confidently, I could not disappoint them."

Cassandra longed for her husband, she had so much to tell him; she gazed at him through the window with an expression that might have been mistaken for sentimental. With Job and Jesse he was standing in the road, blind to all things except the action of the sorrel mare. Heman's garments were not so Sabbatically splendid that he could not ride in them, and he was making her trot and gallop, with a good deal of satisfaction concealed by his imper-
transible countenance. The three observers stood seriously still; Cassandra saw their heads turn to right and left, as

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the mare went up and down; occasionally a comment parted their lips. Then Job nodded, and said, "Yes;" Elias said, "Yes"; Jesse said, "Yes"; and they all came toward the house. Although the watcher was pining to isolate Elias, she had to wait to see whether the meeting between Esther and her father would throw any light upon the strained relations between Esther and Susanna; but there was nothing more to see than a searching look from Job and the girl's averted glance. Then she got Elias into the next room, and gushed out:

"Henrietta's bed was not made, the windows wide open, letting out the heat, and the blankets all on the floor; but she has finished a fine silk quilt of nearly one thousand pieces. She feeds the dirty sparrows fresh slices of bread daily, and the way she wastes the butter I can hardly bear to see. Those six poor children! Do you think it would do any good to talk to her?"

"Certainly not. How they live is not our business."

Elias returned to the kitchen and to the table with a decisive march, and defied her with his first few ostentatious mouthfuls, to which she replied by eating very tiny portions shrinkingly. Disapproving of him, her moral sense also fermented in a general way all through the lavish meal, and when it was over she exercised her skill in isolation to land Susanna out in the yard. There, regardless of the wind in her beautiful coiffure, she made an effort: "Susanna, I think I cannot see it longer. I ask if you will not talk to Henny, and tell her how a mother of six, who has not much to do with, ought to keep house. She dresses and cooks as if Heman were as well off as Job."

There was flattery in this, but Susanna was superior to

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it. She replied, "My sister manages her family as she thinks fit," after which she left Cassandra in the cold.

Cassandra went into the room which should have been a parlor and stayed there with the men, and Elias deferred their departure because of her air of meekly enduring exile, which would have become Noah's unsuccessful dove. Susanna went straight to the kitchen, sent Esther out on a pretext, and then sat and looked at Henny until she penetrated the latter's elation over her successful dinner. Henny questioned with some alarm.

"Yes, something is wrong. I should not have believed that I could feel so irritable to-day—after Jonathan. Henny, you are too careless."

"What have I done?"

"Your bed unmade when we came from church—the blankets over the floor—and how much other work have you left lying while you made that elegant, unnecessary quilt? And your house will soon fall for lack of repairing, Henny, while you give fine dinners and dress like a rich bride."

"Did Heman ever borrow money from Job?" Henny asked.

"No—"

"Well, when he does it will be time to worry. But it is not you who worry, Susanna. Cassandra has been talking about me. Perhaps she asked you to set me right."

"She—"

"You need not tell me. I saw her after she had gotten you outside, and I knew from her face, as if she had eaten a persimmon, what kind of thing she was saying. I don't believe you encouraged her either; but she made you anxious about us, and I want to satisfy you, so I will state

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that we are getting on well, if we don't tell our business to every one, and I keep my house to please my husband, and if he likes to see me in silks he pays cash. Now we need think no more about it. To-day you should think only of Jonathan."

In consequence of these interviews there was more sensitiveness than usual in the party which gathered among the rainbows, when the dinner was entirely done and hands could be laid restfully in Sunday laps. The last to appear was Esther, who seated herself near the door, with her quietly depressed air, not speaking in order not to interrupt the conversation. Jesse, from the other side of the room, shot a comprehensive look at her and gathered data for future deductions; after which he returned appreciatively to what was going on before him. He sat in his favorite position, leaning forward, an intent spectator; he was graceful so, and there was a fine expression on his face, due to his reflection that his father must be the hero wherever he appeared—unless Antony were there. Job's bearing justified this, as he impersonally watched and listened. Elias also listened, and waited for a pause that he might set the women right; and Heman looked as though a tool would be required to open his sarcastic mouth.

Henny was speaking. "The poor little fellow suffered dreadfully. Time after time I told her how to use the wood-lye for his foot, and I kept at her until she did so, and the doctor said it was just the thing to do."

"I have no doubt he suffered," said Cassandra, who made a concession by speaking. "It is wonderful what one can suffer with the feet. Ely suffers in that manner." Elias moved one of his knobby boots corroboratively.

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“But why did you have to keep at her? Doesn’t she take good care of him?”

“She takes care of him in her way, spasmodically, as the flicker flies. I believe she is unable to think of one thing for long; so in the pauses, while she gives herself a rest from taking care of him, he runs wild. Anybody might know what sort of a woman she is from the name she fastened on the boy. *Don Carlos*,” said Henny, with contemptuous affectation.

“It seems strange that such a child, sickly and awkward, should not have been given to a good, conscientious woman who wanted babies,” Cassandra sighed, and went off for a moment into her own little eddy of thought.

“But I thought she was so particular with him,” said Susanna. “I have heard her talk about the trouble she takes—”

“The poor fool, perhaps she does her best! Her idea is to try every charm she can hear of. Once she persuaded her brother to drive to the top of the Blaueberg and bury a peony root—not plant it—to draw out whatever ailment the boy had at the time; and she has had him to the witch-doctor. She also put him three times around the table-leg because he was liver-grown—the little soul! When he was a baby I never saw him without thinking, ‘I wish the good Lord would take him, he is such a miserable little boy, and he would make such a sweet little angel.’”

“Have you no faith in charms and no respect for witches?” asked Cassandra, with her air of expecting a discreditable answer.

“Indeed, no,” Henny replied, with exasperated volubility. “I leave it to those who like it to believe that a

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horseshoe cast with all the nails will do good to a poor sick child, if it is kept under his pillow. As to witches, there are none. I have too good an opinion of the Lord to think there are."

"The Bible says about witches—" Cassandra began.

"I know it does. It says many things; but those times are past, and we may be glad of it. If I have done something wrong to my husband or my children, do I hunt up a goat and drive him over the Blaueberg, and think I have made it right? No. Such a proceeding is no longer fashionable."

"If it is in the Bible, I do not think that it is for me to correct it by then and now. It is there, and that is enough for me," Cassandra eagerly disapproved; and her husband struck in: "*Ja, ja!* There are the charms for those who want them, and there is the doctor for those who want him. It is a good arrangement."

This suited nobody. Cassandra was lugubrious, lowering her eyelids; Henrietta gave him a glance which a particularly acute sophist might have bestowed upon a Bœotian; every one was ready for a diversion, and it came. The gate opened, and Jesse reported from the window, "Why, there is Jonathan!"

To this company he entered, and closed the door firmly, as if he closed it against something that he had escaped from on the road. He looked like a gentleman who finds himself in serious circumstances. It took him a few seconds to distinguish who was before him—seconds of unconscious adaptation and self-collection—during which he was multitudinously greeted, and recognized Cassandra's remark trailing behind the others, "He is thin!" Job and Susanna awaited his deference, but their faces were ex-

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pressive, and as he shook hands with them, he did not need to be told that they were proud.

"Tell us what brings you home so unexpectedly," Henny said, pleasantly.

With a nervous smile he discontinued his salutations and stood back against the door, so that all the seated people were in the position of his audience, perhaps of his judges. Esther, who had stood up radiantly when she heard that it was he at the gate, sat down again; and Jesse's face became acute with interest as they both foreknew a crisis for their contemporary.

"I will tell you," said Jonathan.

His manner procured him silence.

"I see no good in postponing it, now that my mind is made up. Father and mother, I want to inform you that I have left the divinity school for good."

He was relieved when the words which settled his libations were said, not realizing that they were less definite to others than to him. Nobody seemed to grasp their momentousness; every one waited for something more, except Cassandra, who inquired, "Are you a minister already, then?"

"No, I am not a minister. I shall never be a minister."

There were exclamations, to which Job put an end by raising his head with a straight look. Jonathan replied: "Yes, father. I have been dissatisfied for a long time. I do not believe that I am fitted. Therefore, I will not proceed. I will be no lukewarm servant."

The faces turned toward him showed various degrees of disapproval or surprise. They turned to Job.

"How long have you felt like this?"

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“Almost two years.”

“And when did you decide?”

“I came to see Uncle Philip about it this morning, and he—”

“When did you decide, I asked.”

“This afternoon.”

There was an adjudicative delay; father and son were concentrated upon each other; a guttural murmur of applause from Heman attracted nobody's attention. Then Job surprised every one by getting to his feet without another word. Immediately there were movements all over the room, and talk which expressed none of the stronger feelings of the talkers—neither Susanna's mortification before the women whom she had treated with superiority, nor the hopeful, personal interest of Esther and Jesse in Jonathan's independence, nor the quickening of Elias. He felt deeply, for his brother and as a Heilig man, this rebellious return, and found it worse in that house, where the Heiligs had condescended.

It was not long before Job said to Jonathan, unfamiliarly, “I shall walk back with you.”

The announcement had its alarms. As they went out of the house together, the first to take leave, and started away with Henny looking after them, avaricious for news, Jonathan hesitated to reopen the subject, and the scraps of conversation with which he tried to make the best of it seemed flippant to Job. A long, dreary silence fell between them, during which they left the main road for the foot-path which cut across the fortification of high ground into the Thal. Here among the fields were space and quiet for a moral issue; and here Job said, “My son, I have waited for you to explain.”

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"It is as I said, father: I have decided not to go into the ministry."

"You have decided. Do you not think that you owe me reasons?"

"I do, father. My one great reason is that I believe myself unfitted. I have long been dissatisfied. It began last summer a year ago, and I tried to hide it from myself, or shake it off, or reason it away; and last summer I could not longer deny it: it was too plain. I do not want to spend my life between the study, the church, and other people's houses, followed by the women and allowed for by the men."

Job made no comment, but Jonathan did not gather much encouragement from his silence. Assistance was at hand from another quarter. Before anything further was said they had reached the top of the slope that rimmed their territory on the east, and this emergence from the dark woodland in which the path ended gave a vivifying impression of space and freedom. The Thal was half full of twilight, with the most beautiful differences of gray in meadows, orchards, and fields; the cone of the Himmelberg had a gauzy surface; and the Blaueberg swept duskily away with even more majesty than when it was in light. The sun, just dropped behind the western ridge, had not withdrawn his glory; and higher up floated March's own small, lead-colored clouds and March's streaks of copper-green.

Jonathan halted, filling his chest with the dancing wind. Here was his world, with work and peace and the satisfaction of desires: the Golden Age was here.

Self-defence was easier now. "Father," he said, "I hope that you will see this as I see it. You would not have

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me enter the ministry unwillingly and untruthfully, and I earnestly assure you that I can do so in no other way. It is here that I want to be, to work hard and get my living from the land, as former Heiligs did, and as you have done. So it came to me in those two summers, while I worked in the hay-fields and among the wheat, and when I went fishing with Antony. I envied him. That is the work I want; that is the play I want. And I want your approval of it, father."

"You informed me that you had decided."

Jonathan burst out, as if in desperate resistance to some natural, coercive force: "Father, I cannot! It would be one long lie!"

"You decided, in the space of an hour or so, to make vain all the plans which had been made for you from childhood; and then, in the presence of the family, you announced your decision."

"Father! I had debated it so long, and with all care. I thought it was of no use to wait longer."

"You thought."

During this grievous interchange they looked steadily at the Thal. Still looking, Job at last said, with his manner of careful justice: "I do not wonder at your love for your home, especially by contrast with the house which we have just left. We have prospered. Indeed, I thought that we prospered in everything—until lately—" He stopped.

A loud trampling was heard from the main road, which entered the valley farther north. Jesse and Susanna were driving in, she leading Jesse's saddled horse, and at the sight of this progress the father and son began to walk on.

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“They had to drive around a long way,” said Jonathan, absently.

His eye followed the road to the stone house. It was quite dark; but while he watched a lamp was lit, and he thought, “The strange girl must have made that light.”

V

SAUL AND THE FORCES OF NATURE

TROUBLE was coming to the Thal. Henrietta and Jesse, who were quicker than the others at psychological sign-reading and the difficult algebra of temperaments, had foreseen it first; but before long the whole family was under an apprehension which had no evident cause. It was not recognized among them; they would have been ashamed to recognize it; they showed it by not talking much when they were together, and by spending their leisure time apart. Esther was still away. Jesse was so alert mentally that his bodily attitudes were tense, and his characteristic expression of readiness was sharpened until he seemed prepared for an instantaneous leap. Beside his nervous anticipations he had a definite alarm, for he thought that Antony avoided him. Antony's own conduct implied that his whole mind was on the spring work; he labored ferociously, and looked, as he always did, like the stormy quarter. Jonathan, thinking himself responsible for the prevailing gravity, became more and more anxious, and worked as hard as Antony, though he could not accomplish as much after his softening scholastic years; and Saul believed that it was disapproval of him which clouded the atmosphere, so he was as anxious as Jonathan. These two disturbing elements got into the way of taking their

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troubled self-consciousnesses for solitary walks, and at the end of a few weeks they had come to look alike, because the same new lines had appeared on both faces.

Job and Susanna, the only ones who knew exactly what had happened, ignored even to each other the state of the family affairs. Although she was of a nature to be affected by the atmosphere of unrest, she obeyed, relying cheerfully on her husband, when he told her to put no questions to Esther, Saul, or Jonathan; and he kept to himself his feelings and his policies. As eldest brother, as father of several sons, and as the principal land-owner in a thinly settled district, he had had patriarchal authority all his life, and he had never yet met with unmalleable circumstances; so when he now for the first time encountered insubordination, and that in his own daughter, his most tractable son, and the son of his sister, who was also one of his numerous beneficiaries, he could not believe in it. It appeared juvenile to him—certain, in the absence of strengthening opposition, to die of its own futility; and also he did not want to recognize it because it hurt him.

This was an assemblage of unhappy people. That they could be so when spring was in the Thal indicated to Jesse that the inhabitants of Paradise might also be unhappy. He thought this on the porch, about the time of sunset in late April, when the weather and the presence of the season in themselves caused all the young men to start out alone and aimlessly; he reflected also that it was weather to set a man to climbing any available hill, that he might see as much as possible of such a world. Jonathan came wandering past; his gait showed that he had no more reason to go up than down; he turned without a reason toward the Himmelberg. Antony denied information as firmly as

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if he concealed a serious purpose, but he did not know where he was going when he mounted his horse and rode north. Jesse saw him trot up the road, saw Jonathan stroll down; looked after them, with a twist of his lip; and chose his own point of the compass. There was the eastern ridge for him.

Saul had already taken that direction. Near the place where Jonathan, with his eyes upon the Thal, had made the final assertion to Job, was a retreat which had long been his; he had improved his acquaintance with himself there; and now he was on his way to make a decision. In his erect and steady carriage was something military as he went up the ridge, passed the spot which Jonathan would always remember, and turned south, through the wood. The trees were covered with young leaves, but the ground was slippery with those that had fallen in autumn, and he had to walk carefully, for there was no room for a misstep. The path ran precariously along the rim of an abandoned quarry, which made a niche in the side of the ridge, as if an enormous trowel had removed one scoopful. Rocks with weeds growing between them streaked the walls of this niche green and blue, and the bottom was full of rocky ledges. When he had made his way around the rim, among wild azalea bushes now in flower, and had seated himself on a ledge, he could scarcely be seen except from the path, and no one came there but those who sought for solitude.

The symbolism of his position affected him, although he did not know it. His alcove faced the east; the Thal and the sunset lay behind him, and before him a less roseate and a wider world. The old quarry-road had lost its identity in the field immediately below him, and he noticed with a momentary sense of inefficacy how the wheat had obliterated

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what had once been a thoroughfare necessary to men. From his high seat he could see farther and farther across a rolling country like a bay with waves of land. Here there was no more of the sun; the blue tints of evening had begun to make mysterious the blossoming orchards; the evening wind was running over the fields. By contrast with this plain the Himmelberg looked higher than from the Thal; and his eye followed, as it had followed when he was a child, the mighty Blaueberg, of which he had never seen the beginning or the end.

Here was the world into which he must soon go.

Of late, although he had had constantly before him the purpose formed at the critical moment to leave his uncle's house, his feelings had been so strong that, at the times when he meant to think, he had found it hard to avoid losing himself in recollection and emotion or in hopeful dreams; so, as there had come no other such practically decisive moment, he had gotten only as far as the determination that this evening should see completed the plan which would impel him toward his waiting future. Resisting, therefore, the temptation to enjoy the soft twilight for a while, he began to reckon his resources. It was not cheerful. He might not ask advice now, when he needed it most: even by making this plan he defied his uncle, whom he wished to please; and his assets seemed to dwindle as he thought of them. Like innocent Adam, Saul had "a stock of gracious abilities"; but they looked very slight, now that he wanted to get money by them—not enough to be a solid basis for anything. The fact which most encouraged him was that Esther would not suffer by his penury. She would live in comfort here until he could take her to comfort elsewhere—and at that thought the whole matter suddenly lay

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in a hopeful light, and he began to work away at possibilities as if he were doing a sum.

An odor not indigenous diverted him: with the scents of the spring evening mingled pleasantly the smoke of a cigar. Only Jesse in the neighborhood was such a dandy; and before he turned to see, Saul knew who was standing, in a hip-shot attitude, on the path above.

Jesse descended by the path, lounged on a ledge, and made the prospect all his by an appropriating way of looking at it.

“Spring is early this year,” Saul remarked. “I believe I never saw the apple-trees in such a hurry to bloom.”

“Yes. On the second of February the ground-hog did not see his shadow,” Jesse said, as if the ground-hog had told him so; he knew even the gossip of the beasts and birds.

“Have you been taking a walk?”

“The weather sets one moving. The Thal is a nice place; but — especially in April — I should not object to leave it.”

“I don’t know where you would find a better home,” said the evicted one. “I did not suspect that you had any wandering inclinations; you never mentioned them.”

“It does not follow that I have none because I have not mentioned them,” thought Jesse, with his glittering look; but he did not take the trouble to say it, and both occupants of the ledges contemplated the view in apparent peace. Saul reflected that in some circumstances it would be pleasant to confide: Jesse was aware that personal inquiry would be less offensive than usual on such an evening. He went about it.

“Did I hear it said that you are going away?”

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“Probably you did.”

“I should be glad to know more, if you are inclined to tell me.”

Saul slowly removed his eyes from the prospect and fixed them on his hands, as if the flexible palms and long, square fingers had acquired value. “I shall go in a day or two. I should have been away before this, but I waited—”

Jesse perceived that that significant sentence would not be finished. He tried again: “Will you teach elsewhere?”

“I think not. In a trade there is more money; and if a man works with his hands, he feels that he is working. One of my acquaintances at school went into the paper-hanging business in town, and he is getting on well. He was a good friend of mine. I think that perhaps—”

Saul ceased to speak, and looked again at his dexterous hands, flexing one of them experimentally.

“You are anxious to make money?”

“Yes.”

“You want to work hard, and feel it?”

“Yes.”

Jesse noted the discrepancy between his cousin’s past actions and present inclination, and supplied the reason. After an interval of silent companionship he took himself meditatively away, and Saul, watching him move off between the fields, was encouraged. The conversation had braced him: he felt himself bound to do what he had implied that he would do, and he was hopefully engaged upon a piece of mental arithmetic of a domestic kind when Jonathan came along the path.

He swung down over the rocks, and swept the country with his eyes.

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"You breathe hard," said Saul. "Have you been running?"

"No; climbing about on the Himmelberg. On such an evening as this, how can one sit still?"

Saul thought of his reasons for sitting still and planning, and felt solitary in misfortune. Jonathan seated himself.

"Those fields," he said, "remind me how often I have ploughed—you too—in the early morning, alone with the horses, with the wind blowing their manes, and the sunlight in my eyes. Never have I smelt anything so sweet as that newly turned earth. To plough it endears the land to a man."

The disturbance of his mind was evident, and Saul felt sympathy, he did not know for what. He said, "You are in some trouble?"

"I am torn two ways."

The perceptions of both had become so acute of late that fragmentary expression was enough for them. Saul thought aloud:

"It does not much matter what a man likes."

Now Jonathan's own feelings showed him that Saul also felt the weight of necessity. He demanded, "Can a man go against the voice that is in him?"

"No."

This corroboration was no less than a proof of the solidarity of the younger generation, which, in a conflict with elders, would bring its opponent woe. Saul saw this, though from a great distance; and said, earnestly, "We cannot go against that voice; but if it contradicts those whom we honor and would willingly obey, that is hard."

"It is," Jonathan agreed, "but—they dare not hold us back."

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The tie was further recognized in his last speech, as he turned to walk away: "Saul, I believe that you and I are about of an age."

"Yes."

They separated. Now each one knew that the other had a care, and for all their reticence they were allied; a line of cleavage had been established; Jonathan and Saul would support each other as surely as Jesse would stick to Antony.

Saul felt the comfort of companionship in a viewpoint, as he recommenced his calculations about food and clothing and weekly wages. It was new to him to calculate the cost of a woman's clothes, and when he came to that he did not progress very fast; gazing across the country, rather, and seeing neither shade nor light. His plans pleased him better and better; it was almost as if he had already carried them out; and he expressed aloud a high point of satisfaction: "I have asked her nothing. Her father himself could find no fault with this."

Another step upon the path—the foot that fell like no other foot.

He went hurrying to meet her. Assistance in descending that path was impeding to the assisted one, but he had to walk beside her. He cushioned the ledge with his coat for her, and then sat opposite and looked at her rejoicingly.

The weather was changing. It was much darker; all the warm airs had flown away; a cold wind from the Blaueberg moved the tree-tops in the valley, and from the same direction a cloud was coming. Like influences of cold and gloom had been at work upon Esther, as it seemed, and were a fit environment for her now. She was much changed. Saul noticed that her hair looked quite black because she was so pale. The one real beauty of her face was the fine

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modelling of the orbits, but they had become too conspicuous, and there was an appalling look about the eyes—a kind of distraught brightness.

He said, "How does such good-fortune come about, that you are here?"

"I wanted to walk a little."

"It is a long, long time since I saw you."

"Nine weeks and two days."

"And what have you been doing?"

"Helping to cook and sew and take care of the children."

He was uncertain what he might say, and he meant much love by his questions. She should have seen it; but she kept herself turned away, and the pose increased the negative character of her appearance, which expressed quiet incredulity of all joy.

"I thought you had gone," she said, and her voice was also neutral.

"How is it that you did not know that I was still here?"

"I have heard nothing. Since the day when Jonathan came back I have not seen my father or my mother."

"You thought that I had gone without a word to you?"

"Yes."

"You felt yourself cut off from home, and you did not know what to think of me? Is this how it has been with you?"

She bent her head. Then—as if no lack of reserve could make the matter worse—she said, "I came to walk where you had walked."

He could not stand that. He went over to her and took her hand, not suspecting what strength he gave her.

"Dear, nothing could have made me go without seeing you once more. I thought that you would be sure of this."

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“For all these weeks I have been in misery. They said nothing, you said nothing. By day I must do household work with a smiling face; by night I lay with my eyes shut—I wanted to shut out all the world—there was no place lonely enough for me! And Aunt Henrietta and her husband are so happy together!”

“It is over now. It is over now, Esther.”

“You have always comforted me, Saul—since I was a little girl. As you have not left me, I can think that everything is good.”

“I will not leave you.”

They watched indifferently the cloud from the Blaueberg rolling up over them; now that they were together, they could not recognize clouds.

When the older people were spoken of, Esther was gentle; but she insisted:

“They have been unkind.”

“I should have seen you and been away long ago, but I waited for your father to speak of you to me. Now I shall wait no longer.”

“Do you mean that nothing has been said since the night when you brought the valentine?”

“No word.”

“Nor to me. The next morning, while you were at school, they told me to get ready to go to Aunt Henrietta’s, and father took me there, and they have not spoken of you once, or of my coming home. They are unkind to both of us. When were we disobedient or underhanded? Yet they distrust us without reason, and treat us as if we were children.”

“Remember that we look very young to them. My idea is that your father ignores this both to finish and to end it.

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He thinks that when I am gone you will forget me, and he is convinced that it is best for you to forget me; and he also thinks that by these weeks away from them you will realize how it would be not to be their daughter."

"I will not forget you! They are not even just. It seems to me that they reduce the debt I owe them."

"Let us not think of that. I want to tell you—"

His plan looked even better to him in the explaining, but she met it desolately. "You said that you would not leave me."

"As we have been apart the last two months, we shall never be again. We know each other now, and in thought we shall be together, every day, every hour."

"But I cannot see you."

"I go to make a home for you. Think how it will be when I come to take you to it. Shall we not be happy then?"

"I think of how these last weeks have been."

"I want to ask your father for you as a man should, when I have earned a place so good that you need not regret your home. I cannot see you poor, Esther."

"My father will never give his consent—I know him. And do you think that I should not be proud to work for you?"

She kept her eyes fixed upon his with less and less hope in them. "I know how it will be," she said. "You will go away. As you see the world, you will think that we need more and more. We shall put off the time, and put it off again. Perhaps we shall meet occasionally, to care for each other more, to miss each other more. The years will end, and that will be all! It were better that we should be sorry together."

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Hers was the conjugal claim, which does not spare the soul. He saw how completely she was his, and he had to be as generous as she. "Let me work, too, Saul," she was saying, offering herself for service, with eyes and lips as innocently dire as the St. Sepulchre nosegays. He felt love's piteous impotence to deny; and she was sweet.

Now the sky lent itself to the tractive force of the moment: the cloud was directly over their heads, and the rain began. For the first minute the absorbed ones did not notice it; then Saul sprang up, ready to protect, but there was no shelter nearer than Job's house.

Esther flashed a look at the sky, another at the niche; the domestic quality in the situation made her mistress of it. Refusing his coat, she compelled him to put it on; she opened her shawl and wrapped herself in it, long and thin, with a fringed corner over her hair; she led the way to the back of the quarry, and bestowed herself between the rock on the floor and the overhanging rocks in the wall. The angle was acute, and the rain would fall past her unless the wind changed.

"Come! Here is a seat for you!" she called.

The rocks enclosed them on three sides, and they were soon shut in on the fourth by the rain. So absorbing was the storm that even their subject waited while they watched it grow thicker and louder. The mountains disappeared, the tossing trees in the valley were hidden, and they could see no farther than the rain dashing on the wheat. Loud, protesting noises came from the woods behind them; wet, thick smells assailed them; in the uproar they lost knowledge of their perplexities, they felt primevally unscrupulous and hopeful, and the storm grew and grew.

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The fall was not all gray: white streaks appeared, white objects struck the ground and bounded up, rattling.

“Saul,” Esther cried, “it is hailing! It will cut off all the blossoms!”

“Yes. This is a storm from Katzemoyer’s Loch. Who would have looked for it?” he shouted back, with irrational exultation.

The noise of the rain was incredible, and it seemed impossible that there should be so much water in the sky. It was not yet dark; they were staring into a vociferous gray. Suddenly a new element was added: the whole line of the Blaueberg appeared, intensely black, on a fierce white background, and there followed the sulky thunder. The dazzled watchers were no more than marionettes, their mood dictated, their movements impelled, by the insurgence of the storm.

The climax had to pass, and they relaxed also; as the hailstones became infrequent, as the rain slackened, and the valley reappeared, they drew deep, tired breaths. Their exultation subsided with the weather, no longer were they free and able, they were lowered into their own world again.

Saul did not know how to continue, and Esther did not help him. He saw that she was dead tired.

“Will you discuss this further now?” he asked, with tenderness.

“Yes, if you think it worth while.”

“I promised your father to ask nothing of you until I was able to take good care of you—”

“Oh, Saul! You have not needed to ask!”

Her tone and gesture told him much about the feminine point of honor. With a sort of awe, as if he had come into a strange, sacred place, he thought: “This woman feels

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shame, thinking that she has offered herself to me. Now it has come to this—her pride or mine!"

She was speaking, with weary courage, for she had to have some courage after the dilatation of her spirit by the storm. "Although I do not think that father was justified in taking that promise, I will do whatever you tell me to do. Only it was in my mind—that we might be very happy—and lose no time—and if you go without me, the days will be very, very long. You know, I have been used to seeing you daily."

"Esther, did you think that we might begin to be together now?"

"Yes."

"You know what it implies. Would you take those risks?"

"Gladly."

"Then come with me to-night."

The ideal of integrity which he could have maintained if he had been alone was done for, except as it would haunt him; but he loved better this other part of himself because she had been too weak for it. Now beating heart lay against beating heart, and he heard her grateful whisper: "You will not leave me! I shall never be alone again!"

VI

ESTHER GOES HER WAY

WHEN they came to decide on a plan for getting away, Esther took the lead. She was so happy that her practical insight was wonderfully increased; and wonderful were the physical effects of that happiness, the light in the eye, the rosy color in the cheek. Although their programme was open to a number of dangerous probabilities, she felt equal to all of them. It was to be begun by her going boldly home to her father's; and she started, pausing to cover their resting-place with a slow last look which ended and gathered fervor upon Saul.

He went with her to the top of the ridge, and watched her down the slope as long as he could see her. It was nearly dark now, and after the rain the air was extraordinarily sweet. Odors of wet earth and wet flowers surrounded her; she distinguished apple-blossoms and lilacs, and when she walked by the fences she could feel violet-leaves around her feet. She enjoyed the wet and the perfume, which differed the free nocturnal world. These fragrances, invisible and powerful, informing her of various existences in flower, were like connections of another kind, of which she was just aware: it seemed to her quickened imagination that the whole world was netted by intangible live cords connecting heart with heart.

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There was no light anywhere in the house when she reached it: the doors were closed, the windows blank and black; but, although she heard neither step nor noise, it did not feel empty, and she decided that there was some one within who had gone to bed. Taking off her wet shoes, she flew about with only the slightest sounds. She had decided to prepare a luncheon for Saul, and to do this she risked discovery and the necessity of defiance; but by the time it was done she was so afraid of being found by a parent or a brother that she wanted to run up-stairs and hide. It took self-control to walk up, softly and deprecatingly, as befitted her present position in the family, if any one should happen to hear.

As she opened her own room door, and the draught blew toward her her candle-flame, she experienced with the chill a little sinking of the heart, for the entrance into that room was like stepping back—years, as it seemed—among the hopes and hesitations of a maiden, and she felt like a wife. There was more reason for sadness in the selection of the things to be taken with her, limited by the capacity of her large linen carry-all, chosen to suit the needs of her new estate: the difficulty of the choice showed her how little she really knew about her life, even of next week. She had to sacrifice nearly all her dearest belongings, with only the hope that she would again possess them some time. How much it would mean to wear once more the wine-colored silk dress! No less than that she and Saul were forgiven and allowed to return home! It was a very practical collection that was finally buttoned into the carry-all and pushed far under the bed. Her watch, her money, and the bank-book recording the deposit in a city bank of almost all the wages which her father had paid her since she came of age, were

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then laid ready. Between the bank-book and her self-respect a definite relation existed, for that sum might be applied to any one of so many objects that it seemed as if it would suffice for all. She knew, too, that she herself was not useless; but a deep regret came with the thought: "Saul gets very little with me. I wish that it need not be so."

She began to prepare for bed, the most exculpating place if any one should find her, for she had a long time to wait until he should call like a whippoorwill. Now that she was no longer turning over her maiden possessions, the timorous emotions which they suggested ebbed away. All her thoughts, all the wishes of her heart, were softly setting toward the coming hour, when the whippoorwill would call and she would go.

A door closed. There were steps in the hall, and a knock.

With a disproportionate exertion of courage, she went at the knob—saw candle-light, and a face above it—and gasped, "Oh, Bertha!"

"I thought that you would want to know why the house is lonely."

"Did you hear me?"

"I saw you. I watched from my window the storm and the clearing. Now the moon is out. It will be a beautiful night."

The wanderer listened with an absent smile. "Oh, a beautiful night, a beautiful night!" her thoughts lilted. "And if your presence had not impelled me toward him, we might have gone on, no one knows how long, without this happiness—Come in, come in," she said. "I am surprised that you recognized me. You must see far in the dark."

Bertha's eyes, which were deep, clear, and observant

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without perturbation, looked as if they could penetrate several kinds of baffling media. She answered "Yes," pleasantly, and no more.

"It seems so long since I left home! Where have they all gone to-night? May I put out these candles? The moon will give light enough for us."

"Your father and mother drove away early in the evening. The others went by themselves. No one has returned."

"Ah! Well, in the morning I shall surprise them." Esther selected words which were accurately truthful. "Are they all well?"

"Quite well."

"Is my father well?"

The question had an indignant meaning: "Is he altogether unchanged since he sent me away?"

"He is well, but he does not talk much."

Esther understood what that silence covered. Her father's special affection, which had been a bulwark as long as she could remember, was recognized now as a treasure that could be replaced by nothing else on earth. She would still go; but she was softened, and hoped for reconciliation as she would have scorned to hope for it two hours before. Suddenly she was lonely, and awfully aware of her momentary position between two durable states. Strength went out of her at the thought; she felt unable to bear the atmospheric pressure of Life. She needed to confide, and for the last time, in a woman; aware that after to-night the intricacies of her soul would no longer be debarred.

Considering Bertha, she said to herself, "I wonder why I am so disposed to trust her."

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The attitude of the quiet figure by the window, over which the folds of the dark dress had adjusted themselves finely, would have suited a sculptured *Pensive Woman*; and the moon, which had surmounted the rain-clouds, poured thought-disturbing light upon her hair. Rather languidly she moved to rise. The movement elicited from Esther's mood a flash of decision.

She said: "Do not go, Bertha. I have much to say to you. Tell me, what have you done with your house on the mountain?"

The implication of her hurried manner was serious, and Bertha answered with expectation: "Nothing. If any one asks, I am willing to rent it, but it is not likely that any one will ask. It is a poor place; my father built it himself. When your father employed me, I locked the door and left it; and there it stands, by itself."

"Changes may occur quickly. Your life has changed quickly."

"Yes."

"Now mine is at the point of change; my time has come; and though I have not known you long, I am going to ask your help. Will you lend me your house to-night?"

Never in her life had Esther spoken so well as now in telling her tale. Its effect upon the listener, who had been prepared in secret ways to hear it with fellow-feeling, was upheaving; but when it ended she had used her will upon herself, and was ready:

"You are always welcome to my house, but I hope that to-night you will not use it. I beg you not to go."

"Why?"

"Can you ask me? I understand well that this has endured for a long time: your father has seemed hard, you

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have no hope but what you and he make for yourselves; but can you be happy in a new life after you have begun it in such a way? Although I have not been here long, it has been long enough for me to see that you are first with your father; and you know what a grief this would be to him."

"It is not my choice. He gives me no chance."

"That may be; now it is your privilege to give him one. Oh, Esther, I have lost my father, and every one of my shortcomings toward him is heavy on me! Spare yourself this!"

"It is not myself or my father whom I must think of first—"

"And how does it become the daughter of Job Heilig, of the Heiligthal, to slip away with a man by night, and to take refuge on the mountain?"

It did not serve. Back out of the darkness came Esther's response: "Bertha, you have never loved."

This struck what Bertha had been exterminating on suspicion.

Esther continued: "Have I not thought of all these things? Could it be said which should be dearer, my father or my modesty? Both would detain me; but with my Saul before me and all else in the world behind, do you think that I would cast one backward look?"

The voice that answered was as tense as the one that ceased: "Esther, what is this love?"

In the reply there was a strange sound also, as if it came from one receding; but it was happy too. "Can the lost child tell where it is lost?"

They paused. Esther was facing definite difficulties

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with joy; Bertha contemptuously denied a feeling that dreadful things were about to happen.

“Would you not go, Bertha?”

“No.”

“I will go. I would go unasked.”

“I think that for such a thing as this no asking would be sufficient.”

“You will help me to get away.”

“I will not.”

“You think that you will prevent me by telling my parents, but you are mistaken. First, because you will not betray my confidence. I seem to know that you could not do that. Also, I assure you that when the whippoor-will calls I shall go, though I make my way out of my father’s arms. Help me to go quietly, and perhaps I can win their forgiveness later, and they may take me back. Cause a disturbance, and you see for yourself how much harder the peace-making will be. Will you take all that upon yourself?”

“No! No! I am a stranger in this house—”

After a moment to allow her to realize that she was committed, Esther said: “You agree with me that if I get away unseen, it will be much better. Some one may come to this room, but to your room no one will come. Will you take me in? I thank you. Please carry what I put into your hands.”

Bertha carried to her own room the satchel, the bank-book, and the money. Esther suggested that they should lie down; and when the fair and dark heads were side by side on the pillow, she proceeded, still gently controlling the situation:

“This is what we intend to do. At twelve o’clock, when

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Saul is ready, you will help me to take my things very quietly down-stairs. We cannot wait until nearer morning to start, because some of the family might surprise us by rising early; and we must go north, because in that direction we are least likely to meet my uncles, who would want to stop us: both Uncle Philip and Uncle Heman go driving about at all hours. By staying at your house until daybreak we avoid the teamsters who make night-trips over the mountain, and who would surely try to find out who we are; and also we shall not have to drive aimlessly in the dark for all that time before we can go to a minister. You see what kindness it is to give me shelter there. Where shall I find the key?"

Bertha slipped out of bed and got it, and laid it with the watch and money. She had shelved her own judgment.

"I shall return it to you by mail. Then no one will know that you helped us."

During the hours of waiting their friendship grew. When wheels, steps, and voices were heard below, and one after another the members of the family gathered, comparing notes as to their shelters in the storm, Esther checked her breathing, and Bertha did so too. They identified the transit to bed of each one except Antony; they thrilled at Saul's step. Esther confided only the plan for the night, for she thought that the time beyond belonged to him; but the two lay hand in hand, and once she said:

"Bertha, had you not a sister? I wish that you had been my sister."

Later, when the whippoorwill had called, and they had gone very carefully down the stairs, and Esther was safely outside, Bertha leaned from the window.

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"Good-bye, my dear," she whispered. "Happiness go with you."

It was hardly happiness that Esther felt, rather a torturous joy. When she had found Saul, who was waiting at a shady fence-corner, he did not look as she had ever seen him; he appeared larger, more impressive, and more graceful: there did not seem to be anything sufficiently important to say to him, and she felt like weeping. He was wise enough to free her from the weights that she carried, welcome her in a way to express a tender promise, and talk without requiring an answer, so that she should not feel the moment of starting, or notice when the dog decided to let them go on alone. He told her in detail how he had left the house by way of the porch-roof, and quieted the dog with a piece of meat, and taken the team through the grass-field so that he should not be heard. The end of his long speech was, "Now there are several hours before us."

"Those we shall spend at Bertha's house. I have the key."

"Bertha's house? How is that?"

"I told her all about it."

"Very well. If you are willing to trust her, I am."

"I am willing. She was kind to me; I knew she would be. Even while I was away and she was with you in my father's house, I did not hate her."

Saul laid his hand over hers, saying, "This night was made for us."

It was a benign night. Through the deep air, which was cleared by the rain and sweetened by the blossoming orchards, not many stars were visible, because the radiance of the moon obscured them. The dancing of the horse at a shadow and the rattle of a loose carriage-lamp seemed to

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be audible through the whole Thal. The road became rougher as they approached the mountain, then the forest swallowed it; but the spring growth was still thin enough for the moonlight to penetrate freely, and they could see the blackness of the trunks and boughs. After the quiet of the valley the woods were animated: the wind did not let the trees rest, there were many rustlings of little creatures that made themselves known only by a sound, and a couple of owls were calling. Saul and Esther felt no wish to speak.

A small portion of the ascent was behind them when they heard another and alarming noise: a horse was coming very fast down the mountain. Saul drew cautiously over to the side of the road, and while he waited his horse neighed. There was no answering salutation. The other horse and his rider rushed by.

“That man rides as if he were on a serious errand,” Saul commented.

“Did you not know him?” said Esther, trembling.

“I thought I did.”

“I saw him plainly. It was Antony.”

“Why are you frightened?”

“Next to father, he was the one whom I most dreaded to meet. What we are doing would not seem outrageous to the other boys, but it would to him. If he had recognized us, he would surely have interfered. And he is so terribly strong!”

“Could he have taken you back, Esther?”

“No.”

She was sensible enough to raise her mind from the frightful fancy of Saul after such an encounter, and to bring the conversation to a more natural level: “Do you know where to turn in to Bertha’s house?”

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“Yes, but we cannot drive in. I think that we had better unhitch, leave the carriage among the trees, and lead the horse. There must be some kind of stabling, for they had a cow.”

It was a strange bridal procession that moved along Bertha’s path, which was made difficult by a damp spring growth of weeds and many dead branches brought down by the last storms. First the bride walked, carrying the lunch-box and the lantern; then came the groom, with carriage-blankets over his arm and leading the impatient horse. Their goal was no flower-trimmed altar, but a warped, wet, and very tiny house that looked both ghostly and uncomfortable.

“Oh, Saul,” said Esther, stopping short, “I am afraid of it! I do not want to go in.”

“I think that we should do as well on the step, with these robes, if you are not too cold. Fortunately it is a warm night. Would you like to come with me to the stable?”

“Yes. Why, it is covered with sheets of tin! Are you going to put the horse there? If you can get him in, which I doubt, it will be like stabling in a cake-can.”

They had not been gay for so long that they found a good deal to laugh at, while they established themselves on the slab which served for a front step, with a robe for each, the lunch-box open, and the moon to light them. Esther made herself hostess, and found it easy to be entertaining: she was delighted to see how hungry Saul really was. He finished the last piece, and settled in a comfortable attitude, and said:

“That was a good meal. Now I think that I have not a care in the world, if our horse does not neigh to some

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teamster's horse, and bring the driver here to see what is going on."

"Since Antony did not recognize us, I expect nothing bad to happen. That minute when we saw him keeps coming back upon me—"

"I am not sure that he did not recognize us. Antony has his own ways of thinking and doing; one cannot predict accurately about him. Did you ever see a finer man?"

"In appearance he and Bertha are a pair. I wish that we had always known her. What do you think of her?"

"You will not learn to know her easily. She is a companion to herself, one who needs her own approval, and while she has that she is independent; but if she loses it, she will suffer."

"Imagine her living here. Poor Bertha!"

Neither spoke for a long time; it was as though silence had pursued and now caught up with them in the moonlight.

At length Saul said, "Esther, I hope with all my heart that you will never experience such poverty as Bertha's."

"I was not thinking of poverty. I was thinking of good times that you and I had when we were children, and how long we have been together, and how long it will be—we trust."

"Are you happy?"

"I rejoice that I have something to give up for you. I want to do great things for you; I want to show that I feel much. I cannot say well what I mean." She intended, though she was unable to phrase, "executive love."

He made no immediate answer, but she continued as though he had: "Though indeed I do not give up: I am rescued. Since we have been apart, the hardest thing of

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all was that I had nothing to await. When I looked ahead, I was always alone, and wanting you, as I grew old."

He contemplated her with grave ardor. Nothing else in her life would be so precious as the beauty with which he and her thoughts endowed her, for it was the sign of what had come to pass between them, after the ransacking of their souls.

VII

SEVERAL OPINIONS

"I PITIED Ely when he heard it," said Cassandra. "He was distressed enough when Jonathan disappointed all hopes; and how much worse this is! Never before have the Heiligs had to apologize for a Heilig. That is what cuts Ely."

"I doubt if they thought of apologies," said Henny, with combative sprightliness. "In my opinion they did well to obey their feelings. I know that Esther suffered, though at the time I did not know the cause; and I can admire a girl who leaves everything to follow her man. So I would have done for Heman."

This romantic view was so offensive to Cassandra that she had to sustain herself by the reflection that the unfortunate speaker was neither born nor married to a Heilig, and could not be expected to share the more delicate family sympathies. However, Henny now soothed by saying:

"It is so much worse for those who are left than if they had gone in any other way. The vacancy is the same; but peace of mind goes with them."

After this appreciative sentiment Cassandra acquiesced in a long silence, the affair of Esther and Saul having been so thoroughly discussed that they thought of nothing more to say about it. She had driven over to the Geiger house

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on purpose to get the account of an eye-witness, and her eagerness to hear and Henny's to tell had delayed the process of mutual exasperation; but the period of conversational exhaustion was dangerous, it might so easily decline into acrimony, especially as Cassandra had already put up with several things. Although the afternoon was quite warm enough to be spent on the porch, which was made pleasant by the now full-foliaged honeysuckles, her slate-colored poplin, trimmed with fringe, would have received less than its due even in the non-parlor. Also, Henny was more bright-cheeked than ever, with an arrangement of water-curls across her forehead that resembled a row of inverted interrogation-points, and made her look like a contemporary china doll; and she was engaged upon a tidy—daisies composed of white braid with yellow wool centres. It was really good of Cassandra not to evangelize.

Seated rigorously in her chair, and gazing at the peony-bushes in a way to make the satiny, ball-shaped buds pinker with a sense of their gratuitous existence, she modulated her next remark so impersonally that it would have seemed unjust to impute a didactic intention.

“The text might have been meant for us, ‘Why sit ye here all the day idle?’”

“That was surely said to a man: it is only men who can sit all the day idle. For my part, I cannot endure to have no work; and if you are uncomfortable with folded hands, I shall be glad for your help in putting these daisies together. They are to be stitched on pink satin ribbon—Well, if you are afraid to undertake it. It is fine work—I have no doubt that your house-cleaning was finished long ago,” Henny continued, politely ascribing merit.

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“Not all; I have still one closetful of china to wash. It has been a satisfactory cleaning. Every chest I went through, and not a moth did I find. No matter how much help is hired, I cannot think well of a housekeeper who intrusts to others her china or her chests.”

“In that way I am not troubled. I have no chests but the wood-chest, and no china but what we use every day. I am late with the cleaning. Heman will not be here until next week, and he wrote strictly that without him I should not put a hand to it.”

“I try to keep my house so that Ely shall not find out when cleaning is going on.”

“There is a great difference in men. Now, Heman is so anxious to help me that he will at any time postpone a trip West rather than miss the whitewashing.”

At that moment a merry outcry came from the children at play around the corner, and Cassandra realized for the thousandth time that no such voices would ever call on her. “We are told that we shall be recompensed for what we have not,” she thought. “Then there will be a large bill to pay me.”

“And he is so anxious that I shall not lift anything. He always wants to do it for me,” Henny was saying.

Cassandra’s bitterness had no outlet but a petty one. The tone in which she said, “Is that so?” turned this distinguishing virtue of Heman’s into an oddity; and she continued, languidly, but heading off a retort: “You must have had quite a task to find names for all your little ones. I like the name of the eldest—Anna Maria. For whom was she called?”

“For father’s first wife. Since I was a child I admired her picture, so I called my baby after her; but I know no

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more about her than that father married her. I thought that to inquire of him would be inappropriate."

"I suppose that later I shall know why good things are distributed as they are," reflected Cassandra.

"Will you wear this new polonaise that I hear of, or is it more bunched than you like?" Henny inquired. She made a demand of it; as if she had done her conversational duty, and did not care what her inflections were.

"I will not, Henrietta. So far will I go in style and no farther, and if the style goes farther it is no fault of mine. I cannot afford to pay for all those yards of material, only to sit on it and make every chair too tight for me."

"To some people they will be becoming, and I like to try new styles. Susanna mentioned that Ely had gone to Reading for a few days, so I asked for his address, and I wrote him to bring me green silk and ribbon trimming. Now I am anxious to see them. I told him to buy according to his taste, and Heman would settle with him later. Such a kind man as he is, I knew that he would be glad to do a favor for an old friend," said Henny, with a sentimental implication. "And surely you could have a polonaise if you wanted it, Cassandra, rich as Ely is, and growing richer."

In her exasperation Cassandra could not think of the comprehensively scathing reply which she required. Her uppermost thought was, "If Ely delivers that silk without the cash payment in hand—!"

At this convulsive moment Philip Heilig drove at a fast trot up the road and stopped at the gate, and his greeting cleared away complicating trivialities, it was so evident that he had no sympathy with them. Only a stupid person would have intercepted him aimlessly at any time,

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although it was not his own destiny which kept him busy. He took a chair between the two women, and said:

"I have been away for a few days. What is this about Esther and Saul? I want to know before I go to see Job."

The new auditor gave it a new interest; and Henny started in at once:

"I had Esther with me, as you know, for weeks. I thought it strange when her father brought her here that morning in February, and said that she would stay awhile; she was very quiet all the time, and if she brightened up a little it seemed to be because she thought she must; but I asked no questions; I was delighted to have her for whatever reason. Then one evening last week she said that she was going for a walk, and I saw her start, with no appearance of consequences about her, toward the Thal. That was the night of the hail-storm; and as she did not return, I thought nothing but that she had gone home, and was staying on account of the weather. Neither was I surprised when she did not come the next morning, it was such a natural thing for her to stay at home; but I missed her, and should have been glad to have her back, so in the evening I drove over to see about it. And I found Job and Susanna alone in the kitchen, and when I got there the first thing that Susanna asked was, 'How is Esther?'

"I said, 'Isn't she here? I came to take her back with me.' And then I saw, from Susanna's look at Job, that there was something wonderfully wrong. She said to him, 'Now we know why Saul took the carriage'; and he was about to answer, but just then a team stopped outside, and in came Bertha with a letter.

"It seemed that they were too shocked to show that they were in misery; they could speak and act only in that quiet

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way. My poor sister watched her man's face while he read as one watches the dying; and when he had reached the end, he told her, 'This morning they were married. Here is the certificate. They sent it with the man who brought home the team.'

"Susanna suggested, 'Bertha was alone in the house last evening. If Esther came here, she must have seen her. Call her in'; but Job said: 'Shall Esther's father and mother question any stranger about this? Read the letter.'

'She did so, and I with her. Esther had walked over from my house, entered while they were all away, packed her clothes, and gone off with Saul at midnight. She told them exactly how she had done it, and that, I think, was a strange thing, for certainly it did not matter how, once it was done. She asked no pardon; but never shall I forget the ending of that letter: 'Father, though I have tried to do my duty, it may be that I have failed; but in one thing I have not failed. Through my whole life I have most dearly loved you all, and now more than ever. Your true daughter, Esther Gantner.'

"I was crying then, but they were not. Job stood in the middle of the room, and he looked as if it would be like a knife in him to say what he would say. Susanna seemed to know what that would be; and never did she speak more urgently than then, with her eyes on him, praying him not to do it; but he did do it. He said: 'We owe no thought to Esther Gantner; she is a stranger to us. It is right that we lament our daughter, Esther Heilig, who passed away from us last night.'

"Susanna said, 'Job! Job!' And by my soul, I looked to see if he had laid hands on her, although he was not near her; he was staring at the floor. One more useless

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effort she made: 'Do we not forgive the dead?' and he answered: 'No. Only we speak no ill of them.'

"Then I went outside, and there was Bertha, looking white, and the team in which they had gone—oh, my poor sister!"

Sympathetic Henny wept earnestly, and Cassandra was as much distressed as if she heard the story for the first time. They were sorry for the women. Only Philip, looking at nothing and stroking his beard, saw who really had the worst of it in this complexity, knowing his brother's feelings in the final scene as well as he knew his gestures.

Henny stopped crying as if she must do something to help the situation, and that were the only thing she could do.

"Job is a good man," she said; "but, as Heman says, he does not know that there is any will but his."

"He is accustomed to success," explained Philip.

"I pity him; but I pity my sister more. She has to sit and see him use her children as if they were his implements."

"Certainly he does not judge well when to coerce and when not."

"He gave Jonathan no choice about the ministry—simply sent him where he wanted him to go; and I am certain that Saul and Esther never had a fair hearing."

"When you think of these things, be careful to remember at the same time—I don't say that he has done his best, you know that—but that Jonathan has bitterly disappointed him, and Saul has set his wishes at naught, and Esther has disgraced him—"

"So he thinks."

"—And where are the hopes he had for them? How have his teachings resulted? You are right in pitying him."

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Henny said "Yes," submissively, and sat looking toward the ridge that separated her from the Thal, and trying to perceive in what had happened there the connecting thread of justice. As he thought of his brother and of his sister's son, Philip found his "sense of wasted nobleness" very hard to bear. Only Cassandra had no doubts. The large, fair wife resembled those Teutonic women whose authoritative and prophetic dicta could annul the decisions of a chief or stop a battle. She had not spoken before, because it was not time; but it was time now.

She said, "Job has seemed to be a good man; but if he is punished by the actions of his children, is it not for misdeeds?"

Henny would have defended him instantly, but the sight which presented itself diverted the attention of all three. A man and a woman—Jonathan and Bertha—were walking along the road; they looked tall and young, and matched the spring. They did not stop; they saluted and passed on, continuing their conversation, as if there were nothing else for them to do.

Nobody answered Cassandra. She herself said, "I am much afraid that more is coming upon Susanna and Job."

VIII

TWO VERNAL PHILOSOPHERS

UNAWARE that they made an emergency for their elders, the two passed by. They were conversing: later each one would recall what had been said, and would wish to have spoken better. Often as they met—and they had had time to learn to be companionably silent—their deportment toward each other was not commonplace, and every remark was exciting and of uncertain value, like a cipher telegram. Jonathan counted each interview as so much gain, because he was afraid that something would happen to deprive him of her nearness.

He said: "Aunt Henny looks as alert as a bird. I am surprised to see Aunt Cassandra visiting her; that does not often happen. Aunt Henny will laugh, and Aunt Cassandra does not like to see any one gay without solid reason, and not always then."

His remark did not interrupt a topic, for he had been talking of one relative after another. A certain forlorn abstraction in her manner had made him think that she was grieving; so, desiring to see her happy as positively as he desired to be with her, he had tried to acquaint her with the family, in order to make her feel at home. The name of Esther had not been mentioned, for he had perceived that her case had better not be discussed by

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him with this companion: it would open too arresting vistas.

Bertha's response was included in a movement of her eyes toward the row of observers on the porch, then upward toward him. That unmentioned name was the one she wished to hear, and she had a moral craving to discuss the case. The murky winds of regret and self-distrust were tossing her about; since her new friend's departure it had been so; she had been engaged in a silent argument over her part in that affair, which no extraneous happening served to divert. Day and night she meditated it, amazed that she had been so dominated by another's passion, and defending herself to herself with repugnance. "I shall go, though I make my way out of my father's arms.—Will you take so much upon yourself?" she seemed to hear them still; but they did not end it. She kept asking, "Could I have persuaded her?" and was no more able to escape the question than to forget Susanna's sobs, heard by accident through a closed door. Besides, she wanted Esther, whom she had begun to love.

"You belong to a large family," she said. "You are very happy."

"Yes. A large family, if it is united, is a little garrison; and we have been fortunate. No deaths or serious illness, and that is wonderful, as there are so many of us. Troubles which can be concealed are lightened."

She interpreted correctly his last remark as produced by recollection of the overt misfortune of Esther's conduct. Whether he regarded it as a disgrace, she longed to know; it seemed to her that she could not bear to know that he did so regard it. Hearing him speak thus of the family happiness, which she had helped to mar, made her tremu-

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lous; and one of her particular superstitions was also touched.

“Will you not rap on the fence? It is convenient to you,” she said.

“Rap on the fence? Oh! You think that because I mention our immunity, the bad spirits will come to break our luck, and you want me to frighten them away by striking wood? Heilig luck has become a proverb.”

“You call them very rashly.”

He rapped the fence-rail three times, with the vigor of one unpractised in the incantation, and said the word which should scatter the bad spirits. This feminine timorousness pleased him.

“There are three Heilig brothers in my father’s generation, and three in mine,” he continued his effort.

“You must have much in common.”

“Less than you would think. We are very different, and father’s planning of our lives increased those differences. I have heard mother say that before Antony came into the world he was intended for the land—so she expressed it—not the land for him; I was to be a preacher; and by the time Jesse arrived the mill was ready. So Antony was not sent away at all, I was away year after year, and Jesse stayed as long as he pleased, and came home when he had had enough. It gives us different views of things.”

“You have the careers you would choose, however? You are all satisfied?”

“It seems so to you?”

“It is hard for a stranger to know. Your brother Jesse says much, your brother Antony nothing; neither one is a transparent character.”

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“Antony has always been what you see him: he always liked to wander off by himself. He knows the productive power of every foot of land in the Thal, as if the earth informed him of her intentions; and he foretells the weather like a savage. When I was a little chap my greatest pleasure was to go fishing with him. It was not often that he would have me; and he was an expert from the start, and brought home trout that had mocked old fishermen. With his fish-basket and big boots, pushing among the rocks and under thick pine-trees, down the middle of a trout-stream—there Antony looks at home.

“Compared with him, Jesse and I are quite delicately constituted; but he is quiet, and never made trouble for any one but once. He was about sixteen then, and he was sitting in the bar-room of the hotel nearest our house on a Saturday night. He had not had a drop—he said so—but there was a big loafer there, twenty years old and half a head taller, who had had enough to make him quarrelsome. This fellow took it ill that Antony sat there so still and looked at him—and there is something to be said on that point, for I have seen Antony look at a man as if he had better hide in a mouse-hole; and he called Antony ‘*Loppes*’ first, and then ‘*Schwarzer Neger*.’ It takes Antony awhile to get into action, and I imagine that he was preparing to begin when the loafer was still more imprudent, and threw a beer-glass at him, which cut his head. I have always regretted that I did not see what followed. More than one full-grown man was needed to detach him, and the fellow was almost choked to death. All that Antony said to him was, ‘To-morrow you will be blacker than I am. If such an occasion arises again, I will finish the job.’ Father heard from all sides that

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he fought like a bulldog; and father was not displeased."

"Was not Jesse pleased too?"

"You have noticed our family love-affair?"

"That at least is plain enough."

"Her eldest has always been mother's favorite, but I doubt if she feels well acquainted with him; and as for me—well, he talks to no one: I think that he cannot; but Jesse seems to understand him without talking. When he was a baby he began to run after Antony like a little dog, and Antony allowed it."

Bertha had been unable to understand the general pre-occupation with the dark hero, who seemed to her to be little better than a savage; and she suspected that he was honored for qualities attributed to him. As she divined how Jonathan was eclipsed, and saw the sweet temper with which he accepted subordination, her value of him grew. She took courage to introduce the subject that was distressing her, in the hope that he would put it into such a light that she could feel less guilty.

"You have been free from ordinary calamities—I am truly glad; but your sister is no longer here, and I am afraid that that is a great sorrow."

Her hope of extenuation disappeared when she saw his instant depression.

"It is, especially to my father. He never speaks of it. Unhappily, she is not the only child who disappoints him."

Jonathan was very near a confidence, which he deferred because he had an opportunity to do the one thing preferable. As they walked he had only a side view of her; and now she stopped, resting a hand on the fence, and seeming to intermit her personality in a long gaze across the country.

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While he could look fully at her there was nothing that he desired to say, but he had to do something for her, especially when he perceived, from his inspection and the latest tone of her voice, that she was in some present trouble. In the field behind them was a chestnut-tree with a stone under it; and by way of sheltering her in the shade he began to take down the bars. The service was significant to both of them. He would have been glad to hew down trees or displace rocks on this occasion: and his eagerness exalted Bertha, placing her in the class that is fought for and bestows rewards, to which women secretly aspire. Unconsciously she aspired more than most: she craved predominance; such homage she found sweet. Simple as the situation was, it gathered emotional intensity until their own self-consciousness abashed the sensitive pair. The chestnut-tree became a goal, and they hastened to talk trivially. Both were glad to have some one to speak to freely, and to hear.

"I have not even begun a piece of fancy-work since I came to your house, and I used to do so much. My mother did beautiful work: knitting and crocheting and lace-making and drawn-work and embroidery. You would have thought that every piece was the prettiest until you saw the next."

"You can do all those kinds too, can't you?" Though he did not know enough about the subject to phrase it in detail, he implied confidence in her ability.

"Yes, but not nearly so well as she did. She taught me all the kinds she knew except one very difficult lace. She was teaching me that; but it was so hard that one day, when I had been trying for about an hour and a half, and made nothing but mistakes, I caught up the big scissors and cut it all to pieces!"

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She was ashamed, Jonathan was delighted. "Go on," he said. "What happened next?"

"I did not know how I was to be punished, and I seemed to have lost acquaintance with myself. I waited; she took no notice; and I felt worse and worse. Then she said, 'You may put away the needle and the remains, Bertha,' and I took them away, myself, too, and hid in a closet and cried. I was thirteen. After that my mother taught me to do many things, but neither one of us ever said a word about that lace."

"It is a mystery to a man how a woman can be content to sit still hour after hour and run a needle in and out in little stitches."

"It is a great pleasure to make something pretty from useless scraps; and to watch a beautifully colored flower or a fine lace pattern grow under the fingers is a pleasure, too. The woman is creating then."

"You and Aunt Henny would enjoy talking to each other. You almost persuade me that sewing is good for the soul."

"It is." Bertha proceeded with spirit to explain the resource of many inarticulate women. "Every material has its difficulties to overcome; and that is not all. While we lived on the mountain I made a creditable bedroom set: covers for the bed, pillows, wash-stand, and bureau, with a pattern of grapes and leaves, and each leaf and grape padded and stitched. It took me months to do, and I worked at it when I thought that I could not get through the day without seeing—those whom I could not see. The needle is a good companion. The thread moves through the fingers, and one is peaceful."

He reflected that a woman who found supports to char-

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acter in such a neutral process would judge and act in accordance with immaterial standards of her own. By this time they had reached the rock in the spot of shade, and he placed her on it, and his analysis was forgotten for the falling of the leaf-shadows on her face and throat. The leaves were turned by the wind; so were the varicolored spots in the grass, which were really flowers; and the branches of the young wild-cherry-trees along the road waved nimbly up and down. The sun was almost as insistent as in midsummer. He poured himself inexhaustibly, joyously, upon the fields, so dazzling that he made mortals dreamy. From the simultaneous traversing with their eyes of that resplendent plain the two derived a feeling of unity. Together they searched the distances with the varying intensities of blue; together they watched a bobolink, in courting garb of black and white, and ignorant of mortality; the millinery-like freshness of the foliage, the swarm of butterflies, fluttering in a manner only rational when judged by their own aims, were pleasant to both. The green and blue landscape, so full of vernal motion, became phantasmagorical; the pressure of reality lightened; the hour dissolved their reticences, and taught them refinements which they had not known.

“What are you thinking?” Jonathan besought.

Softly, with self-revelation almost nuptial, she responded, “That here the Lord God lingered over his work.”

“And that we have received much?”

“Yes. The constant things: the sky, the earth, and the memories of the saints.”

“At our first meeting we spoke of the hills.”

Jonathan thought of that meeting and its consequences. Now he was aware of them: he knew that her presence had

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determined him, and he exulted in her decisive beauty. He dwelt upon her; the caress of his glance encompassed her, though he could not have interpreted what he saw. She was likely to prove just as high as more than one heart; and she wore with sylvan alertness a body that afforded her spirit a nearly perfect instrument. There was nothing restless about her except the changing color of her eyes, in which could be seen the mysterious antitheses of long solitude. It seemed not too much to hope that she could call the summer.

“Do you ever think about dreams?” she said. “While we lived on the mountain I had the strangest dreams, and some of them repeated themselves until it seemed as if they must have an important meaning. The most frequent one was that I could fly, and I have flown miles through air as clear as this. I had no wings. I was able to rise and maintain my course only by believing that I could; and if I ceased to believe, I would fall. It happened so often that it is almost Bible to me.”

Again he thought from what unpractical sources she fed her character, and how difficult, to such an impressionable creature, her habitual composure must be. He could sympathize with her because he knew that he was regarded by his own father as a reasoner from unreal bases; and he was touched by her confiding. It seemed that she, who had so influenced him, had known only sorrow, needle-work, and dreams.

“What has made your life?” he asked, scarcely aware that he spoke.

“My parents, my two brothers, and my sister.”

“Were not your father and mother educated people?”

“My father had a diploma, and my mother came from

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the city. Both of them spoke English and High German well," she replied, rather proudly.

Although he wanted to hear more, he hesitated about asking; she felt his interest, and said more.

"My sister married and went away, and she died with her baby. A fever took my elder brother. My younger brother was caught in the machinery with which he worked. All this was in ten months. Then my mother could live no longer. My father had been in ill-health before, and he could not continue his teaching, so we came to the mountain. Then he left me, too."

"That was a terrible series."

Now that he knew from what grief she had taken refuge in her airy philosophy, he was touched still more. He asked:

"For what are you waiting? Your eyes never lose their expectant look."

"I do not know," she said, unconsciously acknowledging the expectation.

She lowered her eyelids, with an effect of exclusion peculiar to her, and decisive as the closing of a door; and he felt himself turned out; but it could not be for long. The approach of their two spirits was like the reciprocal pressure of air-waves and water-waves, imperceptibly tumultuous.

"You have done a great deal of thinking," he said.

"During those long days and nights upon the mountain, what could I do but think?"

"On the whole, what do you think?"

With a grave smile—for she was pleased with the cryptical form of his question, and pleased to have understood it—she answered: "I think that, as it is in every one's power

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to be a great person, so it is not dignified to be earnest about insignificant things. Not many of them are worthy of our pursuit."

She was acquiring more and more authority with him. In the soft, propitious silence the moment of confidence could be deferred no longer. Jonathan must submit his judgment to her; it was a way of laying himself at her feet.

His beginning was abrupt, with a destructive string of negatives: "Esther is not the only one to disappoint my father. It is not the case that we all have the careers which we should choose. You do not know what my presence here means. I should have been a minister, as I told you; but that is past. When I came home, on the day when I saw you for the first time, it was to settle the matter, which I had been arguing with myself for almost two years. I have told my father that I cannot do what he desires, and he has closed the subject between us. I think his idea is that if I am left to myself I shall see it differently, but I cannot see it differently. Now, say, what should I do?"

He left the matter in her hands, with confidence that was even pathetic. The tropical brightness of his face, which he turned toward her, recalled his vivid, struggling look when she had first seen him; exultantly she said to herself that he was stronger than she.

"He does not speak of it?" she asked.

"No. That was always his way with us. I have never seen him angry enough to speak out. If he does not do so soon, I must."

"Then he cannot be very angry now."

"What should I do?"

Diverse sympathies—but all with Jonathan—perplexed her: with his rebellion, which was an effort toward his

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own vision of perfection; with his correcting fear of doing wrong. Timidly she said:

“If you wait awhile longer, it may right itself; at least, if it does not, you will have tried.”

“Yes, yes. With the best intentions, how hard it is to walk straight through the world.”

“Hard; but is there a greater pleasure than the meeting of difficulties? They enable us to show that to be human is not mean. Oh, I have done wrong, and I wish to atone; and I have had much sorrow, you have said it yourself, and I have held to what my father used to say, that sorrow and doubt of our own actions, and even the energy of forbidden impulses, may be put to use if we are clear about our purposes. Could I not fly, in my dreams, by believing that I could?”

“In what, then, does our dignity consist?”

“In not lying down among circumstances. In striving—and striving.”

Her voice had an invigorating clearness almost harsh; from that dynamic enthusiasm she subsided slowly. Having never yet contended with her own best qualities, the poor girl believed that she could go through the world as blameless as she desired to be.

Jonathan expressed his participation only by his eyes. He felt the essential impermanence of her pose: she had placed herself too high. But his thought was the thought of a lover of another age and loving in another language:

“Howsoe'er the fall might be,
Would I were aloft with thee!”

Delicate moment! Such as the cautious gods will not prolong!

IX

ANTONY LIES AWAKE

IT was stirring weather. The creek, which was not as low as was usual at the end of June, made cool noises on its way through the woods. Still unimpaired by heat, the foliage and the grass displayed the greens and blues of marbles and copper compounds, as they were seen near by or far away. Many humming-birds combated around Susanna's trumpet-vines; wild strawberries along the road retarded children on their errands, and all the hay was cut. Not only was Job's mow packed full, but five large stacks formed a wind-break along the east wall of the barn. Now the wheat claimed attention by growing yellower with every hot, bright hour, and spreading tawny expanses under a sky so remotely, gloriously blue as to compel a human being to envy the busy birds their proper element.

At this season Antony's was the dominant presence in the Thal. He was in Nature's confidence; although Job gave the orders, it was after consultation with him, and he executed them. He worked day in and day out, and he was a fine sight in the hay-field, with his shirt open across his sweating breast, and his hat pulled over his far-seeing eyes. The arms that swung the scythe so lightly appeared to be made of bronze; the strong feet moved and braced as if the earth taxed them not at all. In his taciturnity

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and molar force there was something not exactly human. He was rather like a genius who might be summoned by the rubbing of a magic lamp or ring.

He had taken to wandering about at nightfall alone, and confiding his direction to no one; and, geniuslike, he drifted through the dusk. So he appeared out of it one evening, at the hour when colors are rather known than seen, and sat on the front porch, beside Jesse. The latter had been there for some time, making researches among last year's walnuts with a little hammer, and observing the movements of the family out of the corner of his eye.

"You do not get much for your trouble," said Antony, referring to some unsatisfactory fragments in Jesse's hand, but with a universal application.

"No. Oh no. These poor things were first hoarded, and then forgotten. I suppose they pay as well as anything."

"A stranger who heard you would take you for a worn-out old man. Where is Jonathan?"

"Walked toward the Himmelberg. This is hard on him."

"What?"

"It is over three months since he came home, and father pays no more attention to his wishes for his own future than if he were a small boy. Not only does he not know what he shall do next. How it belittles him as a man! I wonder what will come of it?"

"That depends on whose patience gives out first."

"It will not be father who gives out first, we may be sure. Jonathan was always headlong. See how he came rushing home, and made his declaration of independence over at Aunt Henny's. He showed no management whatever;

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and he will worry himself into another such move soon, or I am much mistaken. There is Esther, too. Father has allowed her to pass away from us, and I never thought that she was in the wrong. It would be a good thing if you quietly took a hand in her case and in Jonathan's."

"How?"

"Lead father to open the subject, and persuade him to be kind to her, and to give him a proper place here at home."

"It is not my business to persuade father. He knows what he wants to do with his own, and he has the right to do it; and if we elect to run counter to him, we ought to be willing to take the consequences. As time goes on, and they are all three less earnest in their opinions, we shall gradually be as we were, without disturbance."

"You are wrong. We shall never be as we were; and I tell you, more is coming. Father will follow his policy once too often."

Antony rose with a disclaiming gesture, and took himself away; and Jesse, intelligent and troubled, watched him as far as he could see him on the road. Not having heard Bertha come out, he started when he beheld her leaning against a pillar of the porch. As he looked up at her, a peculiarity of his countenance was conspicuous: the fleshiness of the outer, upper part of the orbits gave him an expression of gayety holding aloof.

"That black-and-white dress is calico, but it makes us notice her and not itself," he thought. "The pillar also has just learned what it is made for. And there is that hair again. Ah!"

She was absorbed in watching the beauty of the valley in evening light, distinguished by the little moon. To an exclamation from her, he answered in a queer way he had:

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remaining silent until the exclainer had given up hope, and then replying as if he had just been wakened; but when she began to move off the porch, he said, imperatively, "Go toward the north."

"Toward the Blaueberg? Why?"

"If I were a girl, and wanted to take a walk to-night, I should go toward the Blaueberg."

"But why?"

"Because I would," he replied, in exasperation; and seemed to seclude his attention among the nuts.

Without further question she went laughing in the direction commanded; she should have felt the glittering intelligence of the pursuing eyes. He was thinking:

"When Jonathan walks south and Antony north, on such a night as this, you will either walk north or stay at home."

As she went on the moon grew brighter, and the wind brought evening perfumes from the fields. She felt no physical discords, and was able to draw from the common blisses of the hour assurance that what was before her would be better than what was past: she was happy. She did not know from what quarter Antony appeared, but suddenly he was wandering by her side, with hardly any greeting. This was the first time that she had known him to seek companionship; and it was hard to believe that he sought it now, he made such short answers to her perfunctory speeches. Presently she chose her path as if she were alone, looking at the sky again, and merely allowing him to be beside her if he would. Unhappily there was no way for either of the two to estimate the importance of the interview to the other.

When he was quite ready, however—after preparations which she dreamed not of—he began of himself.

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“I have something serious to say to you.”

“What is it?”

“I am a poor talker. Do you prefer to be spoken to short and plain, as one sensible person to another, or are you like other women, so that I must use many words?”

“What do you want to say?”

Looking at her in a way that any woman might have envied, he answered, “You must take me for your husband.”

The statement was so remote from every preconception in her mind that it conveyed nothing to her. She asked him to repeat, and waited in some excitement; and he did repeat. Then she said no word; but she looked up into his face as she would have looked down at the ground if it had begun to roll from under her.

“Will you?”

She saw that he put the question as a formality, thinking the thing as good as done, and it enraged her; so she answered now, in a sweet little voice:

“Why should I marry you?”

“Why should you not?”

“So?”

“It must be. Try to understand that first. Now I will say more. You know that I am the eldest son, and head man in the Thal. I can take good care of you at once, and later there will be no woman in six townships so well off as you. Also, you will have a father and a mother, sisters and brothers, and the friendship of every Heilig in the county.” Her rigorous face softened. “And there is nothing that I will not give you; there is nothing that I will not do for you. Will you marry me next week?”

“No.”

“The week after?”

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“No.”

“I will wait no more than two weeks. Be sure of that.”

“You need not wait for me two minutes. It will be equally useless, however long you wait.”

“You think that you will not marry me. You are mistaken.”

“I am not.”

“What must I do to please you?”

“Nothing.”

“It would be a pity if you became my wife without liking me. You must try to like me. It will be much better for you.”

“Are you crazy? I tell you again, I will not.”

“And I tell you again, you shall.”

They halted, glaring at each other. She wanted to strike him, but she foresaw how he would enjoy the blow, and what would follow it.

“Listen,” he said. “I must have begun wrong; it seemed to me best to say plainly what I mean. I desire to do the right thing, however, and I ask you earnestly to listen. My father has strange ways with his children. He makes plans for them, and if they follow, good; if not, he starves them out. I have followed; and in spite of that I starve; and no one knows. Here in the Thal is not room for me; here in the country is no place for me. I need—”

He paused, with a horrible gesture, as if he would pluck something wasted from himself and show it to her, and his speech was dammed up. She knew that she was hearing what no human being had yet heard.

“And now you come, and I can no longer bear myself. After dark I walk around your house, and ride up and down your road. There I passed Saul and Esther on the night

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when they got away, and I did not stop them because I knew how he felt. I could even sympathize with that disgusting business. I am another man, and I get no rest. Night and day, in the fields, in the twilight, in my bed, I see you just beyond my finger-tips. It is enough to drive a man out of himself; and in this weather! To stay here I have endured, but this and that I will not endure. You are for me, Bertha Lieb."

He stammered in his effort to describe his obsession. Appalled by the contrast between his tortured looks and the majestic suavity of his movements by her side, she said, with commiseration: "Stay no longer. Why should you stay?"

There was something Psalm-like in his self-revelation and frank appeal. "The Thal is far too easy for me; until now I have stayed for my father's sake. His life is all here, and he is getting on in years, and needs a head man. Still, I must have a life for myself, one way or another, here or elsewhere; though were I elsewhere, I should, no doubt, be laughed at, because I have not the education of Jonathan, Saul, and Jesse. I have been brought up for the Thal, not for the world outside."

Ardor did not appeal to ardor quite in vain, and she was glad for this diversion. Although she could not withhold all admiration from him, and although his insistence, like Jonathan's deference, placed her in the ruling class, yet she occupied the interval with the calm thought that she must leave the Thal. She did not know where to go, but she accepted Antony's temperament as an obstacle like any other conformation of nature.

The interval was brief, and ended with a shock—only a look, but so steady, fierce, and longing. Though he saw nothing but her, the environment affected him without his

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knowing: it was like accompanying her through her proper world, to walk beside her thus in the dusk, with the stars hanging low. Late as it was, a cat-bird snarled in an elderberry bush, and as they passed over the roadside turf, they trod upon small, unimportant flowers.

“Now I have explained it to you,” said he. “I await your yes.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

She had a pang of pity for him. Truly piteous was this waste of creative passion—as the sinking of gold in deep water or the spilling of wine upon sand is piteous. Also, she respected the energy which so desired and demanded. She felt very humble before him in her refusal; but he only saw that she gazed at him with an enraging aloofness—as if she deigned to wrestle with him, like the angel with Jacob, and might at any moment spread her wings and soar. Then he got beyond her, catching her wrist, and exclaiming, “You shall not shut me out with those white eyelids!”

Enraged by his lack of discipline, she retreated as far as the locked hands would let her. “*Sei ruhig, freundlich Element,*” she would have said, but it was now too late: the situation was too elemental. Night was so near that she saw him all black; and simultaneously there came upon her a breeze that had passed over a honeysuckle, and the unmerciful pressure of his arms. It was as though something sprang upon her—something duplex, formidable both to body and to will. She tried to wrench herself away; there was a wild moment between the two powerful creatures; and she heard his breathing, and felt his hard lips upon her wrist, upon her palm, as if he drank.

She pulled herself free, and went flying along the road.

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As he shouted, "Bertha! Bertha!" he saw her run faster at the sound of his voice; so, instead of following her, he went north, and the woods harbored him. He walked far; he prowled around her home. To do this had been something to him once, but now nothing less than herself could solace him. Late in the night he came padding down the mountain, and found the house all quiet, and went in and laid himself upon his bed.

He was tired, but he could no more sleep than could a cataract. Although in her presence he was unable to speak as he would—could never speak as he would—he poured himself out now, wordlessly and at long intervals, to her, who seemed to stand beside him in the moonlight, whose voice he heard, even to the finest tone. It was a primeval epithalamium:

"You say you will not, but it must be. I have not said all, you did not listen. I shall tell it to you again, and you will see that you must not refuse me. Perhaps you will ask why? It would be like you. I can think that in heaven you would ask 'Why?' But it must be. Shall a man go absolutely through the world, and have nothing?

"Bertha, you are a woman, and higher than we, so there are things which you cannot understand. You must learn that when a woman causes this for a man, it is just and right that she recompense him. Otherwise she robs him—his strength, his will to work, his pleasure in the world—she takes them all. You would not rob me, Bertha? When I have thought of it so much: since the first day of your coming here? In the beginning I did not know it for what it is, but soon I knew that it was my woman whom I recognized, and since then no hour has passed without that recognition. Why do I see your face at every turn? Why

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would I pound to death the man who tried to take you? What are they for—these miseries—if you deny me? Are they to be in vain?

“And I was so glad that I could give you a comfortable home!

“Won’t you listen, Bertha?”

The logic of his need quieted him: this thing would come to pass because to do without it would be unbearable. After a while he slept, and woke not unpeacefully; and he was up at dawn, with his mind full of the two labors which were before him: the harvesting of the wheat-crop and the acquisition of the woman.

The wheat was too quiescent for the attempters who went in procession toward it; they would have advanced more appropriately to fight, three and three, while hostile armies sat around. Antony walked first, then Jonathan, then Jesse. By the scant attire of cotton trousers, cotton shirts, and broad straw hats the outline of their muscles was displayed; their uncovered chests were brown; the straight gaze of their black eyes intimidated. Each one carried over his shoulder a cradle with wooden teeth and a long, efficacious-looking blade; and a festal feature was introduced by Jesse, who had a red rosebud between his lips, and in his hat-band a full-blown rose. It was no wonder that Susanna deserted her work to stand on the porch and watch them to the field, or that she drew her eyes away, back to the common things of her life, with a foreboding maternal sadness.

Shining in a whitish sky, the sun devoured the morning mist which made the distances pearly. Streams of dew from the wheat ran off the blades, and the cut stalks smelled fresh. The reapers did not speak; they worked, not over-rapidly, with a bliss-giving play of muscles, as if in the per-

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fect mechanism of their bodies no cog could slip, no part be weakened. The large-featured faces were thoughtful; beads of sweat rimmed the steady, closed lips. So they kept at it for hours. The mist had disappeared, the sun was rotund, and a good space had been reaped when Antony saw Bertha coming, bare-headed, through the field to bring them food.

He worked faster, for he saw her not more plainly now than he had seen her ever since she left him. Jesse threw down his cradle; Jonathan went to meet her, and took her burdens; but she preserved in her manner the distinction between herself and the master's sons, and waited gravely on them all. Although the heat was intense, and the men ate little and drank greedily, they all had a certain ardor in their eyes which made this heat seem proper to them. As soon as he had finished, Antony went back to his reaping. He had discarded his hat, and the sun sparkled with different colors in his black hair, which grew so thick and low that it was like a cap. Jesse rolled over in the shade and slept. Jonathan, his cradle in his hand, stood talking to Bertha, who was ready to return to the house. She had not looked at Antony once, and all morning she had been wondering where to go when she left the Thal.

Although he seemed to notice nothing but the grain, he saw well the attitudes of those two; and in the country morning silence, which the swish of his cradle and the wind in the trees intensified, low voices carried far. He heard Jonathan say:

“If you go, we can drive anywhere you like—over the mountain or anywhere.”

“Thank you, I think not.”

“We have walked together five times. Why do you refuse to drive with me when you admit that you like driving?”

ANTONY LIES AWAKE

“It is not my place to drive with you. Every woman in your family would tell you so.”

“To such nonsense as that I should not listen from any one but yourself. I hope that you will not disappoint me. If you do, I shall think that you object to me.”

“In that case—”

Antony, coming over, said, “No, she will not go.”

His brother’s angry astonishment was challenge enough, but the fatality was that he saw the same in Bertha’s eyes.

“What have you to say to it?” Jonathan demanded. “Bertha, answer for yourself.”

Too outraged to speak at once, she looked from one to the other, as energetic as they.

“She is my woman, and she shall not go. That is what I have to say to it. What right have you to think of her? You have nothing to keep her with.”

“A—ah!” she gasped.

“Is this true?” Jonathan demanded of her, in a clutching voice. His face was dark red.

“No.”

“Will you go with me?”

“Look here,” said Antony, stopping her. “I know very well that it is not for me to begin, because I am three times as strong as you; but I warn you that against any man, brother or no brother, and no matter how delicate, I stand up for my woman. You have long been favored over me: you were the one selected to go out into the world and make a figure there; on you was the money spent, while I stayed here and worked hard to earn it. Now you come back, and this you will not, and that you will not, and the other thing is what you choose, and you expect to oust me from a part of my inheritance. Is not that your little idea? You

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may, too; for land and money I care not a swing of this cradle; but keep away from her."

Bertha sprang back, her eyes began to glow, and she stood utterly still, as Jonathan, holding his cradle in both hands, lifted the murderous implement, and swung it by way of answer. It was dazzlingly quick work, but Antony was also quick enough. His weapon met the other, and they caught with a terrific clip and ring, while the wooden teeth flew into splinters. There was a stupid struggle to unlock them. It would have been easier to throw them aside and go in with fists, but both men were too wild to see that, and they wrenched at the cradles and swung them again, each aiming at his brother's body with the action with which they cut the grain. In three seconds there was a red gash on Jonathan's cheek. Another charge, and Antony's hand suffered. The two had become animals; they dodged like animals, their panting and clashing were horrible. The woman locked her fingers and set her jaws, for Antony was driving Jonathan into the wheat, and at any second it might trip him—it waved so unconcernedly.

At that moment Jesse moved, sat up, looked—then he came leaping. Jonathan, whose forehead was full of big veins, was recovering his weapon from a blow. Antony swung his; blood-drops from his hand flew through the air; he landed it. He mowed down Jesse.

The youngest brother reeled over on a pile of cut grain, twitched, and moved no more. During some heart-beats the three who remained upright were as motionless as he; then, at the same second, the poses dissolved. Bertha threw herself down on her knees beside him; Jonathan swung away his cradle, and went to help. Antony looked at the fallen one, blinked, and walked across the field, his hand dripping on the wheat.

X

ANTONY REAPS THE WHEAT

THEIR brains were turning. The exposure of their feelings could not be faced, nor could its consequences, which placed each one, before the eyes of the other, in the red light of tragedy. They could only act on instinct, and instinctively Jonathan submitted the horror to Bertha, with the one question:

“Do you think that we can get him home alive?”

“We must just try.”

It looked hopeless. When he had been laid on the door brought by Jonathan from the nearest shed the sun was so bright on his eyelids that Bertha covered them with his hat, but it seemed as if no sunlight could disturb those eyes. This was not like Jesse, with nothing mobile about it except the rose in the hatband and the growing red stains that would not stop—this which they carried, at head and feet, from the wheat-field to his home. Job had started early to cross the mountain, and would not return until evening, and Susanna was alone. Although it occurred to Jonathan that she should be prepared, he could not think how; he could devise nothing but to go on, to lay upon a decent bed the burden on the door. Bertha thought of it also, but she was in deadly haste for Jesse; so they marched ahead, and Susanna was attracted to the porch and saw them.

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The mother took command at once, but Bertha needed no directions. Seeing what was to be done, she interrupted them in Jesse's room only long enough to say:

"I shall go for the doctor."

Jonathan looked up from his task. "You cannot hitch a horse. As soon as possible, I shall come and do it for you."

"I can. You stay here. I shall bring the doctor. Do you want your Uncle Philip too?"

"My God, yes! But can he come in time?" said Jonathan, wretchedly.

Sympathy with him emboldened her: this was her opportunity for courage, and she grasped it; she dared to harness Antony's own horse. Her methods were bewildering to him, but she made him understand her, and he was quite ready to take her anywhere. Their speed was a new thing for the country roads by daylight, for races generally occurred in the evening; other drivers took it for a runaway, and pulled toward the fences. The doctor was on his rounds, and she pursued him, saw his muddy buggy a long way off, caught it, and dispatched him at a gallop. Then she went for Philip. She could have wept when she learned that he was spending two days in the city.

As she took up the reins with shaking hands the horse felt that she was afraid of him, and behaved teasingly. She was afraid; she felt very weak and drove slowly, for there were so many dreadful thoughts ready for her. What would happen when the doctor arrived—when Job arrived? Antony's return could not be dwelt upon. She was terrified at going back herself.

All the absent ones, and especially the doctor, were awaited in misery by Susanna and Jonathan. What they

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could do was little, although it seemed as if his mother's efforts should snatch Jesse back; and when everything they could think of had been tried, they stood beside his bed in helplessness. Silence and deferential waiting were imposed by the face, suddenly contracted and gray and fearfully still. They knew him to be alive; but he was so near the other state that he required deportment not of earth, and his thoughts, if they existed, were the mysterious thoughts of the dying.

"If the doctor would come!" said Susanna, in a humble tone.

"She will bring him. She will find him. Uncle Philip too."

"I think that Philip is the more necessary. If my son goes from me without a minister! That could not be; it could not be permitted so." She expected that it would be, however; and Jonathan was appalled, for he could read her mind.

"If you had not been a grief and a disappointment to us all, you could have taken his place, and done the last service to your brother."

He bowed his head without answering.

When she spoke again her voice had gathered decision; it had a majestic sound. "Jonathan, now that we have done all that we can, and have only to wait, do you tell me how this awful thing has happened."

He opened his lips to obey, and realized that there was nothing that he could say; he could tell neither who nor why.

"Well?" Susanna required.

"Mother, not now. It is an awful thing, indeed; and we must be ready to help the doctor when he comes, not in the middle of such a consideration. Wait."

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"I think that you can tell me how it happens that Jesse lies here."

"It was an accident—"

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes, I am sure."

"Whose accident?"

"Mother, let it go! Let it go!"

"Let it go! You also have been in this accident, by the blood upon your face. At first I thought that it was his. And where is Antony?"

"I don't know."

"So? Some of you have gotten into trouble, and I desire to know what. Tell me, Jonathan."

"I *dare* not tell you."

"Why not?"

The answer that he could not give presented itself to Jonathan, the abominable scene was once more before him; before him too lay Jesse, as the first result. Weakened by the restraints and exactions of the past hard months, and facing the overpowering prospect of his own implication and what remained for him to live through, he could support no more. He made an inarticulate sound of appeal, and not in vain. This son, who was always the most remote from Susanna of her three, had during his contumacy receded still further; there had been times when he had been judged by her almost if he were the son of another woman; but the sight of his distress brought him back to her. She looked from one to the other, knew not which to feel for most, and could be separated from neither. Laying her hand on Jesse's hand, she drew Jonathan's bent head to her shoulder and said nothing, and waited for the minutes to pass.

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The clock ticked them away—Jesse's minutes—and it was as if they went before the watchers visibly in a dire procession. Intolerable waiting, in the noiseless house, with no sounds of work coming from the fields! For a little while Susanna's thoughts concerned themselves with Bertha, who had witnessed whatever had happened; but she proudly determined not to question her; she would not owe to that girl any knowledge about her sons; and she soon ceased to wish to know, the way of it was so unimportant. Jonathan also was thinking of the stranger. Without the smallest hope for Jesse, uncertain whether that night his father would give him a home to lie in, and realizing that, even were he suffered there, home had become untenable, he could be sure of one thing only: that the story of the fight, which involved Bertha, should not be told by him.

So the three waited—Jonathan, Jesse, and their mother. There was something gladiatorial in their patience.

The doctor came; and when the heart-rending performance was over, they learned that they must go on waiting alone together, and unsupported by hope. In spite of the worst, they could not hasten Job, for he had gone a half-day's journey, and would return in the evening, unsuspectingly. The wounded man had been dragged back to consciousness, and by way of rousing him, the doctor asked:

“Jesse, who hurt you?”

His eyes closed; he made no effort to reply. It could not have been said in what world he now was, but loyalties persisted there. The others thought that he had not heard; Jonathan divined that he was protecting Antony, and drew a long breath.

Presently Bertha's team was heard; and thinking that Philip was with her, they exchanged glances of relief.

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Jonathan hurried down. Beside his disappointment at seeing her alone, he found cause for anxiety in her pale, drained looks.

“You are worn out,” he said, helping her to the ground.
“You drove hard.”

“Yes.”

He noted the incoherent arrangement of straps and buckles and the lathery flanks, and asked, “Had you ever hitched a horse before?”

“No.”

“Had you driven?”

“Twice, with my brother.”

“Yet you took Antony’s horse, because he was the fastest, and went, having hitched him yourself, to bring the doctor. You were afraid too. And after helping to carry Jesse! Poor girl!”

As she had thought that her effort would not be noticed, she had to turn her head to hide sudden tears; but she did not instantly move away from him, and they both had a happy moment before she went into the solemn house. There she set to work to do what common things were necessary, putting her wishes for the family into her serviceableness. He wandered out and in. Susanna sat by Jesse, traversing her own abysses; and Jesse, like the others, was expecting. Death, Antony, and Job were awaited through a day that was longer than any day not of joy should be. It was early evening when Job, the first arrival, came.

Leaving Jonathan in her place, Susanna went to meet him, and found him hot and cheerful after a good journey. When she had told what she had to tell, he could say nothing at first. The gaps in the story were no more uncon-

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vincing than was the main fact: irreconcilable was such a calamity with Heilig luck, and he had been so conscious of divine agreement. In a state of mechanical unbelief, he went with his wife into the room where the proof lay, and confronted it. Before that face, grayer and more aloof, it would have been a flippancy to talk of life. Susanna saw the event more clearly than before her short absence, and, now that her husband had come, she wept; and Job, standing in amazement at this illogical misfortune, comforted her without giving his mind to it. Many years had passed since he had oriented himself, and judging from what he had already lived through, had thought, "Life will be like this"; and now the placid course was changed Life; turned a different side to him.

Involuntarily they moved away together, for they could not speak of happenings there. When they were in another room, Job said, "You tell me that Antony, Jonathan, and Jesse were in the field together. Bertha went out to them; Jonathan and she brought Jesse back in this condition, and all Jonathan will say is, that it was an accident; and Antony has not come home."

"So it happened."

"What does Bertha say?"

"I do not need her to tell me about our sons—as you did not need her to tell you about our daughter; nor did I press Jonathan, who is in deep distress. I thought it best to wait for Antony."

"I also believe that he is the one to tell us. We know Antony. But why did he fight? And with Jesse? Jonathan would have been more likely."

"Jonathan was not out of it; he has a cut across the cheek. As for the reason, it is my idea that Bertha—"

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“You think that it was over her?”

“I am sure, though no one has told me one word.”

“Then you do not know. Wait. When Antony comes home we shall hear. Now do you go to bed, and sleep. Yes, I ask you to do so. The rest of us will divide this night, and to-morrow you can take charge.” He faltered—the next night looked so doubtful to both. “And you shall be called if necessary.”

She could scarcely bring herself to it; but he wished it, and she went; and Bertha took her place, where there was nothing to do but listen to the crickets and watch the light of the fat-lamp flickering on the wall. For a time Job and Jonathan sat on the porch together, apprehending Antony’s coming, until Job could be inactive no longer, and saddled a horse and rode off to search. Long before his return Jonathan, gazing into the dark and thinking, heard Antony’s unmistakable step on the road. Then he appeared.

“Who is that?” he inquired, coming near.

Jonathan got to his feet in a hurry, guarding. It was light enough to see that the new-comer was half drunk.

“You!” said Antony. “Why must it be you? Keep out of my way, for God’s sake!”

Surrounded by his own atmosphere like a passing portent, he disappeared into the house. Jonathan heard him mount the stairs and go quietly to Jesse’s door, where he stood awhile before opening it. Instead of the lamps and the watchers, and the certain arrangement of the sheets which he had expected, he discerned first Bertha, turned in her chair to see who was entering. He sighed then, and beckoned to her, and she came, looking intently into his face, which was eroded by the night and day. His gaze at her ignored her gaze: each face was of final importance to the other;

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at the moment they forgot the last anxiety for this new one of their meeting, but they were haggard from what had preceded. Bertha stood with a kind of backward drawing of her figure, and in her attitude a reference to the bed. Antony overhung her.

“You see me again,” he said, “but do not be afraid.”

“I am not afraid.”

He even smiled at that; then he looked at the bed.
“He—?”

“He is living.”

“Has he spoken?”

“No.”

“I am here to see him and you. To-night I am going away. I bid you good-bye. I would also say that I shall come back. It has gone ill between you and me. If I had been like Jonathan or like him, you would not, perhaps, have so despised me; I might not have had to wait. As it is, I will wait; but I shall come back.”

“Listen,” said she, with forlorn courage. “It is right that you come back, but not for me. Here, before your brother who cannot hear us, I tell you: do not come back for me. And where should I speak the truth if not here?”

“And before my brother, who cannot hear us, I tell you I will come back for you unless I die. I also speak the truth. You have your woman’s uprightness, I know it well; but you are dealing with a man. Good-bye, now. Why, I will not offend you! You are mine, little Bertha. That is what you cannot understand. Come, give me your hand. You might do as much as that for me.”

She gave what he claimed; and after an instant of recompense, he put her gently out of the room, saying: “I

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have something to do here. Afterward you may take your place again."

What he had to do was with the one on the bed. He stood looking at the powerless bulk and half-opened eyes, and thinking that that was Jesse, and that he had done it; and as he aimlessly waited the lids were lifted. Jesse himself looked up.

"Well?"

Antony had almost to touch his lips in order to hear, but it was a word—that word. He took a bottle from his pocket, and poured a little between the lips; then he knelt by the bed. Although it seemed that Jesse wished to smile and could not, he gathered strength quickly—perhaps from his companion.

"Yes. I will stay awhile," Antony assured him; and waited, kneeling.

"You must have worried," said Jesse, in a shadow of a voice.

"Yes. Yes."

"Do not."

"Do you think that you are going, Jesse?"

"No."

"That is right. Stay—for me."

"Yes."

Presently Antony began: "I am going away to-night. Jesse, can you hear me? Here I can stay no longer; I will break away, and try for myself. I am glad to do it. Since I was younger than you, I have had the desire; and to-night I will free myself. Also, I shall let you know where I am, and how I find things."

"Where?"

"West."

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“Later, I follow you.”

“That would be a good move. If you say so, I shall gladly wait awhile.”

“Why should you? I am no handsome sight. I shall meet you later.” Jesse accomplished the reply with long pauses.

Antony nodded, in admiration of this sense; rose to his feet; and lingered. Seeing a word coming, he bent to catch it.

“You fought about her?”

“Yes.”

“Women—!”

By the inflection Jesse synopsized his impressions. It cut the hearer, who stared with woe-begone eyes across the bed, reviewing his last days.

“Good-bye,” he said.

Jesse repeated, “I shall come after you,” and followed his hero out of the room with his eyes. When Bertha returned, she found him—not bending alertly forward, with his air of watchful interest, but trying to express an interest grown intenser by the limited mobility of those eyes. They were alive indeed.

Seeing that he wished to speak, she in her turn hung over him, with momentary happiness because he could speak.

“How do you feel?” he whispered.

She thought that he was wandering, and repeated, “How do *I* feel?”

“Yes—you—the cause. It must be a task to be worth all that. Now let Jonathan take your place.”

He tried to move, but his body warned him, and soon he appeared to sleep; having no more reason to listen, for he had heard the last of Antony’s steps.

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They were as careful as Esther's last steps in that house. From his own room he went to the kitchen to get food before he departed, for he had eaten nothing since morning, but he did not know what he ate. Like every one else in that house, he was the victim of pressing thoughts, which began upon him again as they had dealt with him all day, and he had to sweat to master them. Jonathan, un-punished, aiming at his place; Jesse half-killed by him; Bertha not acquired; that was much for one man to brood over. However, when he reflected that within a few minutes he would have put everything behind him, he exulted. It seemed that he could dominate even this, and take what he would have from the world. His father's return, when he heard it, was not now recognized by him as the approach of a superior officer, but as another man coming, whose presence accentuated his newly felt freedom. The door opened, admitting a band of moonlight, and he looked at Job in an unparalleled way.

"So," said Job. "You are here, and in Sunday clothes."

His manner summoned Antony to rise, but Antony did not move.

"Come outside. I have something to say to you, and there must be no noise in this house."

From the momentary exchange of looks he knew that he was in danger of being defied; but Antony was now ready to leave, and came out, therefore. Job sat on a bench, in his unconsciously judicial attitude, with his short whip across his knee. Antony occupied the other half of the bench, on an equality, and the smell of whiskey came into Job's face. The moonlight through the fruit-trees showed them to each other.

"You have been much needed here to-day," said the

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father, deliberately, "and you were elsewhere. I want to know what kept you away so long."

"Business."

"You seem to have been transacting it in the bar-room."

"It was my business."

"I was not aware that my head man was conducting any affairs apart from mine. This morning I left you in charge of the work, I found you gone when I came home, I waited for you to appear of your own accord, then I went to look for you; and where did I hear of you? In the lowest tavern that you could just find. The hostlers were making a good joke of how Antony Heilig had been hanging around the whole day, and how he had put away any God's quantity of whiskey. They all knew you well. It seems that you are a regular customer."

"I make my own choice of a place to spend my own money."

"You are mistaken. My overseer, and still more my son, runs up no such bills and makes no choice from among such places."

"That may be; but I am no longer your overseer."

"You may omit that until later. You can be sure that no son of mine shall continue to bring scandal on the family by getting drunk in low bar-rooms. And that is not all. Now I will hear what has happened to Jesse."

"Have you not seen him? Then you know that he was cut by a cradle."

"It is not for you to inquire what I know. Answer my question."

He could see Antony's mockery in the moonlight; and it was as if Saul had just betrayed him, and Jonathan had

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just disappointed him, and Esther had just left him, with this new thing added.

“Why do you not ask Jonathan?” Antony demanded.
“He was present.”

“When your mother questioned him, he took it so hard that she said no more.”

“So. But you do not consider whether I might take it hard or not. You require information—”

“I will have this information. Answer me. Who has killed Jesse?”

“You go the wrong way to work. If you had asked me civilly, as one man to another, I should then willingly have told you what I could. Now—”

“Did Jonathan?”

“No.”

“Did Bertha?”

“Lord, no.”

“Then you did.”

“Do I deny it?”

“Why?”

“That is between him and me. I will tell you no word more.”

Antony was smiling in pure joy of freedom. Job felt himself stripped barer and barer of patriarchal honors.

“You refuse to tell me what I ask you?”

“I will tell you no word, I say, of what is not your business.”

“Not my business—when one of my sons mows down another, and he is dying of it?”

“There are things which go beyond a father’s claim. You ought to know that. Were you never young?”

“I believe that the fight was over this girl. It may be

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that you offered her a remark, or something more, which she resented. If so—she, poor, alone, and in my keeping, and my hospitality made dangerous by a son—then, go. Here you stay no longer.”

“You are very sure that I was the only one to blame,” said Antony, in a lonely voice; and continued, half laughing: “However, you are right in one point, for a change. Here I stay no longer.”

Job drew back a little, out of the moonlight.

“But before I go I shall tell you a few things. Although I don’t know whether you can take them in, seeing that you are *so* a man, to try it does no harm. You think that you live in justice to all men, but that is an error. You rob your own children. In your way they must walk, or, by God! you push them off the path.”

He brought his face close to Job’s.

“A-a-a-h! Look at me! No education but for your Thal; no interests but in your Thal; no pleasure anywhere! Here I was to stay, to work for you, and you are the cause that, now that I cannot stay, I go like a tramp instead of like an independent man and a rich man’s son. Jonathan has taken his way, and Esther and Saul have taken their way, and now I will take my way, and make it, too; but I shall not owe it to you. You are to blame also that where it is most weighty to me I am shoved aside and despised! I was never consulted. No, I was to live as you decided. And now, what is there to make me wish to live?”

“You are more drunk than I thought; you do not know what you say.”

“I am not drunk, and I know well what I say; and you know that I know it, too. A-a-a-h, you righteous old man!”

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The snarling face almost touched the shaded face.

“Stand up!” shouted Job.

Laughing, Antony threw himself back on the bench. Job’s action, which rage rendered more than usually powerful, took him by surprise, and he was hauled to his feet. At first he resisted, and an unnatural fight impended; but as soon as he understood his father’s intention he was still, and even assumed a more convenient position.

Job’s shadow, which looked like a black monkey, began to move violently.

At first he held his son with his left hand; loosening his hold, as it was unnecessary, more and more strength went into his right arm. The short whip jerked up and down through the moonlight, cracking loudly; there was no mercy in the thing; once when it struck Antony’s neck, the mark was plainly visible to Job, who observed it and continued. Each time it fell the recipient laughed, until too much had been taken out of him; then he stood as still as the trees, and suffered.

“Now!” said Job, when he thought that he had done enough.

They faced each other; and Antony, on his side, said: “Yes. Now!”

“I have given you a lesson. If you had had more and earlier, it would have been better, I see. Now, follow your own judgment.”

The moment during which they continued to stare at each other might have ended in anything—in reconciliation, parricide, or valediction. When it was over, Antony began to move away. He was stately; for the first few steps he walked backward, and he retired among the trees. Even after he had disappeared, Job did not stir until the doctor’s

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carriage stopped before the house, and he went with a matter-of-fact gait to light the doctor in.

Antony heard the carriage wheels on his way to the retreat which he had selected. He had had no desire to defend himself against his father, because what he was going to do was so much more satisfactory. In those blows there had been inspiration. He was compelled to repay them—would have repaid them in the next world; and as they continued they beat out every obfuscation of his mind and every check of virtue like dirt, so that he saw his purpose plainly before him in a series of infernal pictures.

The place where they were to be realized was a treasury of wealth characteristic of the Thal. At the present season the willows which protected the barn were so thick-foliaged that the moonbeams scarcely penetrated; and there it was dark and quiet enough for the drip from the water-trough to sound self-assertive. Stamping hoofs were more frequent than usual, because all the thirteen horses happened to be in from pasture, representing a sum that would have been a small fortune to a poor farmer. The cattle, passing a comfortable, meditative night in the pen, showed by small movements their recognition of Antony's presence, and attracted him to lean on the fence and look at them awhile, during which the Holstein bull came leisurely and waited to be rubbed. There was a low, confidential noise from the bull, as if he were calling after a friend, when the man moved away toward the five haystacks. They and the hay which packed the barn—the result of fertile ground, propitious elements, and men's honest and trusting work—might have been Antony's own creation, he had had so much to do with them.

No one else had as good a right as he to go climbing up

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into the mow, which owed and made him a soft bed. He enjoyed it until, through the air-hole whose location had determined his, he saw the doctor drive away, saw that there was no light in the house except Jesse's glimmer, and long after. Two or three times he drank, luxuriously, without avidity, and as luxuriously surveyed his position with respect to his own life and its obstacles. It was pleasant now to do this, because of the recent liberty and the exultation; and there was also his beautiful repayment to begin immediately. That first—and then to walk away into the subjugable world.

He set to work.

He descended the ladder to the stable floor, hunting the rungs with his feet, for he was not taking the trouble to light anything more than was necessary. In the middle feed-entry he was able to put his hand on a remembered piece of board, which, when he had broken it, served well to cover the loose pile of straw which he pulled together on the floor. One match was enough to start the blaze, and the wood delayed it, as he had intended. Although he had planned to fasten the doors on the inside, it now interested him to put an element of chance into the situation.

“I shall leave them unfastened,” he decided, “and any one who really wants the horses can come in and get them. It will nicely warm that good young man, Jonathan.”

Then he ran for the ladder. No planning was necessary in the mow, where he had only to strike matches and throw them about to secure a fine, crackling illumination. His agent was not strong enough to roar at first, but it soon would be, and he had to hurry lest it seize its director. Cautiously, watching the effect of the draught, he opened

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the wide door which led from the mow to the slope behind the barn, and stopped for a survey before departing.

"I made this hay," he said, aloud. "I made it for the old man. Now I may take it back again."

There was no time to lose if he did not want to be found there, with his satisfied, creator's look, for the glow was already bright in the air-holes, and from the open door a great flare was shining. He hoped that the light would not be noticed at the house until more had been accomplished. At present everything was promising. The flames were crackling louder than Job's whip as they ran omnivorously about the mow. They ate away at the pile, and if they found a little, solitary stalk hanging to a rafter they ate that to the very end; the air moved with their luminous motion, and was permeated with their noise. It filled his head, the smoke drawing through the doorway wrapped around him and made his eyes smart, and the surfaces of his body which were exposed to the fire felt as if they would burst. Surrounded by the slow smoke and the glare, he was more genius-like than ever, but it was well for him to close the door and be away; so he saw that the rafters were going, the floor catching, and the hay a terrific mass, and shut it in, and went, while panic started among his old acquaintances. The horses began to scream, the pigeons were bewildered and flying at random, and he heard deep protest from the cattle-pen.

The trees around the barn and around the house were so thick that he was quite sure that through the double screen no one had yet seen any unusual light, so he indulged a fancy which led him past Jesse's window and Bertha's. Hers was dark, and he walked slowly by, looking up. Under Jesse's he stopped to watch the glimmer of the fat-lamp,

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thinking: "If he knew all, Jesse would still uphold me. It may be that at this moment Jesse is not in life. If she knew, it would make it much harder for me to get her."

What was going on in the barn did not now seem enough to pay him for his losses. Another idea occurred to him, and he went to find out whether he had time to execute it before getting away. When the roof caught, the fire would soon be seen, and the family would appear, if the heat and the burning smells did not bring them out before; but it had not caught yet, although the whole interior was blazing, for the stone walls confined the flames. He could hear them roar, and also an irregular thudding caused by the cattle as they jumped the pen. There would be time, but he must make great haste; so he ran by the mill, and swung himself over the fence into the nearest grain-field.

From that point to the top of the eastern rise the land was all in wheat, of which only the small portion was cut which the three brothers had accomplished that morning. It was almost too ripe and dry, requiring to be harvested at once, before it seeded, and the thickly covered slope, up which a light wind was running, looked soft and beautiful in the moonlight. Antony's task was easy: it was only to walk along the fence throwing lighted matches into the wheat.

By this time streaks of fire were rising into the air from the barn roof; the family would come running out now at any moment. He wanted to be where the view was best, so he hurried toward the path along the top of the rise, beyond which was the quarry, memorable to Esther and to Saul. The wheat extended almost to the path. When he had reached it he established himself comfortably, with his

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back against a tree, took a comfortable drink from his bottle, and proceeded to enjoy the display.

It seemed to have no connection with reality, to be rather an expensive spectacle. The wheat was disappearing in splendor. Across it the flames proceeded in a straight wave, lightly streaming upward into pillowy smoke. The barn was far advanced. Fire shot through apertures in the walls, a steady column of fire rose through the roof, and the smoke was like a whirlpool, carrying up sparks amid a continuous roar. The wind from the conflagration moved the willows, which were scorching in the intense heat. Above all this the moon looked peaceful; the moonlight outside the burning circle was incredibly white.

Now began what Antony most eagerly awaited. One figure after another dashed from the house into the circle of light. Identifying them with his far-sighted eyes, he enjoyed their movements and their attitudes, as unconvincing as those of manikins jerked by strings into a semblance of distraction, and as resultless. It was especially interesting to see Jonathan run to the barn door and open it, and the fire burst out at him. Interesting also was the ringing of the bell intended to call the field-workers to come and eat; its voice, wild-sounding because it was pulled so hastily that the tongue clung to the sides, affected the ear as the flame-light affected the eye. It went rolling and shouting over the valley and up into the mountains. Then neighbors came, on foot or horseback; there were people on the house roof, people in the road; and Antony was as much aware of their shudders when the wagon-shed caught and when the last of the five stacks burned as he was of the pungent, characteristic odors which the wind brought him from the barn.

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"You may as well enjoy the sight, as I do," he remarked. "You can do nothing. In time it will burn itself out."

The fire at the barn was so eventful that he forgot for a while to observe his other fire, which was below him; and he did not remember until he had had a last drink, holding the bottle in the hand which had been cut, and which the latest dexterity required of it had caused to bleed again. Then he saw that the flames had spread wonderfully over the grain, and were crawling up to him, with the air of coming to their master's feet. They would stop only at the quarry edge, and they were brighter than could be imagined. He stared at them in admiration, he did not wish to take his eyes from them.

"But I must get away," he thought. "They are coming fast."

They were. It seemed as if they would spring upon him if he took his eyes off them; they glared at him, and he at them; and he started out of their way, still looking, and went stumbling backward.

"So much fire," he said, with wide eyes upon the flames.

Many confused ideas were in his mind: Jesse on the bed; his father with the whip; the endless day at the tavern, alone for the most part, with a glass before him and such thoughts; and Bertha's voice, and Bertha's palm which he remembered softer than it was.

He repeated: "So much fire!"

When he did try to look where he was going he could see nothing; after that staring, his eye could report nothing but darkness. He went on for a few steps. Suddenly there was no ground for his advancing foot, and he fell.

He went no farther, for there was but one short journey before him, and he did not need to hasten. When

ANTONY REAPS THE WHEAT

the flames which he had made had eaten up his wheat, they climbed to the top and looked over the quarry edge at him, but he did not care to look at them; the eyes which could see so far were fixed. He lay there on the rocks by himself, while the burning and the shouting and the despair were going on in the Thal; and while clouds rolled up detaining the smoke, and the night began to whisper with rain, and his flames roared a march for him before they died.

Job found him in the morning.

The owner of the Thal went out at dawn to see what was left in the Thal. First he looked at the roofless, half-calcined ruin, shaded by fire-blighted willows, where his hay had been, and his horses and many kinds of riches; then he looked at his cattle, for which there was no shelter, and at his corn and oats, which he had no horses and implements to harvest. He went across his wheat-fields, black and covered with thin ashes moving in the wind, to the top of the eastern rise, to see the desolation all together.

When he had seen who waited on the rocks, he ran down. Antony's garments were wet, his locks were pointed by the damp. Job looked and felt. Then he took his son on his back, reversing the way of the generations, and carried him up to the top and over the slope, and along the road toward home, in the rain.

XI

HOUSES OF CLAY

JOB had been lying beside Susanna, who slept. Her obedience extended even to sleeping on such an occasion; but her position was uneasy, and she made plaintive sounds. He lay straight, with eyes closed and hands folded on his breast, looking as if he had excluded the world, and were independent of it. As to his thoughts, they were busy. The incidents of the day having been sufficiently meditated, he had advanced to search for reasons and connections, and space and time were not too roomy for his questionings, which could be imagined traversing the ether like meteors. Proper to his spirit, dignified above its perturbation, was its present environment, of airy darkness and the subdued breathing of conjugal peace.

The breathing was interrupted. Susanna woke with a wail, and clutched him without waiting to see whether he slept or not, exclaiming:

“Job! Hear them!”

“Hear whom?” he asked, with a kind of soothing repression.

“I hear the sweetest singing, and it comes from far away—out of the air. It is the angels—no others could sing so. It is for Jesse. Let us go to him.”

She began to rise, and did not delay while they spoke.

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"What do you mean?" he asked, although he knew.

"You know that when a soul rises they welcome it with singing, and that sometimes others are permitted to hear, too. Hurry! I hear them, and I must see him before he leaves me. Why did I go to bed? I might have been with him all this time!"

"You are dreaming, Susanna. You know that Jonathan would have called us."

"I am not dreaming. Perhaps he fell asleep, and his brother dies alone. Do you not hear those voices? Here at the window they are still more plain and sweet. Job, come! What is this? A strange light! Oh, what is about to happen?"

"A strange light!" exclaimed Job. For a second he thought of the Nativity, its light and singing; then he lowered his voice, mindfully. "Whatever it is, you must have courage. You must stand by me, will you not, dear wife?"

At that moment, as she instantly responded by cutting short her exclamations, a run of feet down the stairs was heard, and Bertha's voice at the door, to which she flew.

"Jesse—?"

"No, no! The barn! The wheat!"

They hurried on their garments and ran, Job and Bertha out of the house, Susanna to Jesse. As a reward for moderating her movements and opening his door softly and going with composure to the bed, she found him as she had left him. A whisper dispatched Jonathan, whom the sounds of excitement had put on the alert, and she began quietly to close the shutters, finding in the location of the room on the side of the house farthest from the barn the one small thing of which she could be glad. She was afraid to leave

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her son, to see how far her home was to be demolished, for, although the music which she thought celestial was no longer in her ears, she believed entirely in her explanation of it, and feared that the moment of her absence would be his last; so she sat by him, resolute and terror-struck, not knowing on which side the first blow would fall. She expected his death; she expected disturbance outside which would by shocking him precipitate it; she awaited calamity to an unknown extent. It seemed to her that she had been waiting all her life.

Not many minutes passed before the first thing which she dreaded happened—the wild sounds of the bell—and immediately Jesse stirred and opened his eyes. She tried to withhold the answer which he silently demanded, but he would know.

“The barn is on fire,” she admitted.

“Then I must—help.”

Under the effort which he made to rise, excruciating even to see, his whole physical being seemed to cry out; but he persisted, although she exclaimed, “Jesse! Jesse!” and flung herself toward him in dissuasion. Laying her hands on his shoulders and making them heavy there—although his struggles were rather with his body than with her—she pleaded with him, and he stared at her with antagonism, still faintly moving.

“Jesse! The best thing that you can do for us is to lie still.”

That made him yield; and together the patient pair listened, looking into each other’s faces, through the smoke which came crawling into the room, for interpretation of the noises which they heard: many feet tramping, orders shouted, the loud talk of neighborly interest, then a silence,

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ended by a smothered crash. Both knew that the falling roof must have made that sound.

A long time passed before any one was at liberty to come and tell them how it went, but when he could, Job appeared, distressing with his burnt hands and blackened face. He was beckoning her out when a delaying word from Jesse made him stay to give his news: "It is all gone. Parts of the walls which have not been burned to lime are standing, but they will be of no use; the roof has fallen, and the fire is still burning inside. We could save nothing but the cows, which are loose in the road. The stacks are destroyed, too; even the willows are half killed. As to my wheat, I have no more."

"You do not mean that all the horses—?"

"Every one. Jonathan tried, but if he had gone in he would not have come out. We were too late; it was too far ahead when we got there."

"All the horses! The bays, the sorrels, Kitty and Harry, and Antony's black—!"

"Now, as I speak to you, I do not own one horse."

"What did you say about the wheat?"

"Whoever did this made a good job of it. The wheat is burned on the stalk. The fire went all over the fields, and up as far as the old quarry. Not one bushel remains. If I had not put so much in wheat this year!"

"You think that we owe all this to some one? You think that it was set on fire?"

"It must have been."

"Where is there such a person?"

"I don't know. Do you?"

"I can't imagine."

Susanna's reply was without reservation, and Job looked

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away so that she should not see that he had a suspicion.

“What did Jonathan do?” she asked.

“What he could. He worked like a man.”

“It is strange, that with all this, Antony does not come home.”

“He is not here,” said Job, and walked out.

Jesse took it quietly; and Susanna allowed no one to replace her, and did not leave him. There seemed to be no reason for moving; nothing better, indeed, in the world, than to watch him, hours later, fall asleep. It was after dawn when she went out into the kitchen, which was half lighted by rainy light, and found Jonathan collapsed in a chair and looking as if the weight of the whole day and night were on him, and Bertha busy about the room. His mother heard him say:

“If only I could have saved the horses!”

“That no one could have done; it was too late. You did all that was possible.”

“I saw some of them when I tried to go in. It was hell for them, and they did not deserve it. I hear their screams now. Poor old white Kitty, who worked for us twenty years! And Antony’s black—”

“No man could have done more than you, indeed.”

“And to have to close the door on those poor creatures! To close the door, and stand in idleness, and watch the whole thing burn!”

Susanna thought, “My son Jonathan goes to her to lament, and does not come to me.”

There was time for no more. All three put themselves aside at a sound which manifested itself: steps and loud breathing, merely; but the breathing desperate, the steps

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laden. Susanna reached the outer door first, flung it open, and met Job. His eyes were large and bright in his smoked face, the working of his lips twitched his beard. On his back, sustaining him with difficulty with his burnt hands, he carried Antony. The ashy fields which they had crossed were wide, the slope slippery, the road long. He laid him down now. Then he himself began to sink; and his other son caught him and helped him to a chair, and later helped him to leave it. For days he helped him so.

During those days the inmates of the afflicted house sat at meals, lay down, and rose for hours that would bring sorrow, under such pressure of crowded calamities that even the appearance of their surroundings was appalling. It was as if the desolation of each mind were materialized there. Familiar windows displayed a view from which there was no escape: of the shaky ruins of the barn, which the forlorn willow-trees could only half hide, and of corn-fields waving green beside the broad black stretch where the wheat had been consumed. Within, all the pictures and the mirrors had been turned toward the wall in sign of mourning, and were a continual reminder through the slow time when the active presence of the living was less real than the presence of the two who lay still upon their separate beds. The one of these had not been told about the other; and why Jesse never mentioned Antony was a puzzle to the rest, who feared that he would do so whenever, with a great effort, he uttered a few words. To Susanna, to Jonathan, and to Bertha the one thing to be hoped was that he should die without too great pain, and without knowing the truth. The latter two whispered how ironical it was that the omniscient Jesse should be ignorant of such a matter; and that it seemed that he must know what lay

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in the house with him; and that he would find his destination enhanced by Antony's presence. This idea gave pleasure to Jonathan, who needed all the comfort that he could get, for he was exhausted in every way. Since the night of the fire, when he had exerted himself demoniacally, all his will-power had been needed only to propel him; and what he carried in the way of recollections and anticipations was too much for any man. His state was the cause of extra anxiety to Bertha, who was now involved a second time in exterminating misfortunes. She would find herself weeping, in her bed at night, involuntary tears. Were they for her own people or for these people? Sometimes they seemed to be for all the world; sometimes for herself and her part in this coil; often for the excluded Esther, who had given up her right of participation. So far had Bertha identified herself with the Heiligs that she conformed to the curious habit of reticence which now kept them apart from each other, under the influence of a common dread of discovering who had made the fire; no one questioned about anything, because they were afraid of what they would find. Without embarrassment she had volunteered to tell her part in that night's history: how Jonathan had taken her place beside Jesse; how she had then gone to her room, but not to bed, because she did not feel able to sleep; how, as she sat there in the dark, her attention had been attracted by an unusual light in the barn, and by the flare-up of the nearest wheat-field, when she had gone running to Job. That was all she said, and she did not do her heavy daily work with the complex manner of a secret-holder.

No help for anybody came from Job; he was not himself. All day he sat preoccupied, making no attempt to rise from his chair, and speaking only in monosyllabic answer to the

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innumerable relatives and friends who condoled; and when he was consulted he postponed every suggestion—would not have the fields cleared or the barn touched, would say nothing about Antony—until they were obliged, in his presence, to disregard him. Something pre-eminent, at which he must look and look, seemed to have crowded his patriarchal responsibilities out of his mind; although he was the patriarch still, he was an indifferent one. He appeared immitigably unhappy.

And Susanna played a fine part. Knowing only what she had witnessed of these catastrophes, knowing also that all the others were better informed, she acted on her perception that now was the time to demonstrate her ideal of a wife. Information was nothing to her beside that: information would restore her nothing; and when they were able they would speak without prompting. So she did not question much, even in her own mind; addressed Bertha as usual if infrequently; and respected perfectly the overwhelmed silence of her husband and of her son. All the while she was doing her duty as mistress, with a wrung heart, receiving visitors in throngs, and offering as best she could consolation and assistance to her men. According to her theory of conduct, this was the bearing of the aristocrat.

But for Antony she could do nothing any more.

It was a special grief to her that Job made no move toward either of his sons, and did not break his silence for them. On the last morning of Antony's visibility she led him to the room where their eldest lay, and they looked at him together. Job said then:

“Why did God waste Antony?”

At that moment he did not seem to be her husband; it

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was like having a stranger there. Presently she found herself alone with her son; and she could look at him, and set no limit to her grief except that of sound, and no one would know unless Antony knew; but what she felt showed itself not at all. This that lay before her was the climax of her misfortunes.

There was no sign of impairment upon him except a clean bandage on one hand. The blackness of his hair and lashes was more lustrous than the black folds which covered him, and which, to clothe his magnificence, had to be wide and long. He was dusky and still, but not more so than she was used to see him; apparently he was as much there as he had ever been, and she could not believe that he had come to an end. It seemed an evil prodigality to inhum a creature as he.

She thought of the earth, and how he had known its needs and its fruition, and that it had still a secret for him which it would soon impart.

She thought of him as a product of her flesh, and as a spirit with possibilities beyond her spirit.

She leaned over him as if he were a little boy in bed, sinking her head lower and lower, until her face lay in the folds on his breast, and holding him by the shoulder and the uninjured hand. She did not make a sound. What her body had felt at his birth her robbed soul felt now.

Scarcely could she leave him long enough to prepare herself to accompany him, and she hastened back to sit at his side. Antony, as he lay there, was not more dark and stately than she; both had the dignity of those who meet great odds, independent of the outcome of the meeting, and beyond the common world. Now for the first time in days she exacted nothing of herself. She sat still, and Philip en-

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tered in his robes, ungreeted by her; and when the other relatives came, she did not lift her eyes. Elias and Cassandra, Henrietta and Heman, all respected her so much as not to approach her, nor did they disturb Job; the glances by which they tried to see how to show sympathy with their brother and sister were sufficient proofs of loyalty.

No one else was to come. Half the county had heard by this time of the troubles of the Heiligs, and that the dead brother must be put away without the usual concourse lest the other brother should know and be hurried in his dying. To keep Jesse in ignorance it had been arranged that Bertha should stay by him, as she had done before, with all the doors closed, so that he might hear nothing unusual in the house, and with a name ready to give if he roused himself long enough to ask for whom the church-bell was tolled. Susanna consented to the omission of the ceremonies made significant to her by long association; but this small gathering and surreptitious farewell affected her like a slight upon her son. Although she saw tears on Cassandra's cheeks, and that her sister was as near to her as she could be without intruding, and that Jonathan sat apart, his face expressing, in accordance with successive thoughts, the higher altitudes of regret; yet in real truth she was alone with Antony, as she had been alone with him in his babyhood; she was speaking to him, and he was understanding.

"When I thought that I heard the angels welcoming Jesse, they were singing for you. I did not think of you. I have not thought of you enough. Forgive me. They were your angels."

But she could not be left undisturbed. Bertha—coming in with deliberate steadiness, and with a demeanor that

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awaited blame—approached, and with permission addressed her mistress:

“Jesse has found out. He has been trying to talk. He said that he knew, and that I must confirm the truth; and I did so. Now he insists that the doors shall be open, so that he can take part in what is done for Antony. What shall I do? Shall I open them?”

Susanna signed affirmatively, with a strange look, as if she could not conceive of such a world, so extraordinary in its useless sorrow. Bertha opened the doors wide. The sublime words were said, and it was time to go. When they set out there began in the next valley the public lamentation of the church-bell, and she heard it tolling continually as she accompanied Antony in state to his finality; and heard it in anticipation for Jesse, too.

When it was over—although she was at home again, with her own people around her, and Jesse was still alive—her likeness to a being unimplicated, observing with amazement the workings of such a world, did not diminish. Instead of immediately replacing Bertha, she allowed Jonathan to conduct her to the room where Job had resumed his chair and his undiscoverable thoughts. Philip and Elias sat on either side of him; Heman, Henrietta, and Cassandra were not so near; the Heiligs were in session, and maintained distinctions. Behind the forward-gazing eyes of some and the lowered lids of others a variety of expectancies grew. More than one noted and awaited developments from the mood of Susanna, whose rank in the assemblage was certain, her adherence not so; and there was not one who did not find bewildering the contrast between Job Heilig, who had ridden hard through the county and sat without self-depreciation among the elders, and the

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denuded being who seemed only half aware that they were there. That corded hand with bluish nails, lying on the unsteady knee, could not lift a whip, thought Heman.

“Brother, it is hard for us to believe that this is you,” said Elias.

As if claiming membership in the aristocracy of grief, he replied:

“I am Job Heilig.”

Cassandra, decorously withdrawn and preserving the proper feminine silence, thought: “Why Job instead of Heman? Why is not the thriftless house afflicted? From those six children one or two could have been spared better than from the Heilig men, my husband’s brother’s sons.”

Philip spoke in his turn: “Brother, we earnestly wish that we could comfort you; but we cannot. The Lord God himself must do that.”

“God—” said Job.

His tone startled Elias. “Brother, be careful of your words and of your thoughts. These troubles are severe, but they have surely come by your own fault. You have neglected something.”

“You see my fields burned over and my barn burned down; my youngest son lies dying on his bed; my eldest you have just now assisted me to put into the grave; and you say that I have neglected something!”

“*Ja, ja!* You have been negligent, or else you are punished for a sin done in secret, brother, and it concerns us, for these afflictions bring suspicion on us all—us Heiligs!”

“But this punishment is a good thing, for when a wrong-doing is punished the matter is at an end and is not charged up. Without doubt it is a good thing, and might have been

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much worse," Cassandra's sweet, powerful voice endorsed her husband.

Between her reddened lids Henrietta's eyes sparkled. "Your idea is harsh. A man may easily make mistakes; for instance, he may be overlenient with his children; but that is the error of a kind father, and should be judged accordingly."

"It may be that this man is under correction for something which he would be sorry to have us know, or it may not," said Heman. "However that is, some trouble for him was to be expected, because it never happens that one man goes striding uninterruptedly through the world where the rest must make their way with difficulty. No. Sooner or later the turn to suffer comes to all of us, else we should be too unbearably proud. And it must be faced."

There was a confusion of replies. No voice was raised; but they were deeply in earnest, and did not wait upon each other. Philip asserted himself:

"What you say, Heman, is unkindly meant, but there is truth in it. Troubles have come to our brother as they come to all of us, and we must stand like men, and so he has and will."

Another interlude of quick replies, all adjudicative of Job, was ended by Jonathan, who assumed an elaborate manner to insult his elders.

"I have read how pleasant it is to sit in a warm house beside the ocean and watch a ship going to pieces in a storm. That was written long ago; but it seems to be true still."

Chiding looks bombarded him; but Susanna, interposing, drew their fire. She was clear about the wife's point of honor when the husband was attacked from without.

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“If you have not learned to stand by one of your own, and if you can think of nothing better than to blame him for his miseries, then you might as well be common people, and not Heiligs.”

Astonished by the double attack, the censors would have responded, and the first words were being said when Job began to speak:

“I am pretty tired of you all, with your ostentatious comfortings, sitting by me, and discovering in my conduct the reasons for my misfortune; although I admit that it is a good thing that you see these negligences and these secret sins and this unbearable pride, and repent of them, and keep up the standards of virtue and piety in the Heilig family. Now I shall ask you—since it is you who know, and not I—what have I done? Have I taken what is not mine? Have I betrayed a woman or done injustice to a man? Have I refused charity, from the dues of the church to the tramp at the gate? Have I ill-treated my land or my stock? Have I in any small instance failed to push the interests of my children? You all sit silent, and look horrified. No, to all that? Then what?”

As he began to rise, Jonathan in amazement moved to assist him, but he was already on his feet.

“I was prepared for your charges. I thought that you would come to sit in judgment on me. What is your judgment to me now? My crops are wasted, my sons lie dead and dying; and now I feel that I am an old man; I shall have no more sons. My children have brought my troubles on me! My efforts for them have failed, and I must be ashamed of their undisciplined natures, and ashamed of my failure to guide and coerce them. If it had been flood or lightning or any such evidence of the wrath of God, I

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could have stood up under it; but through my own children! And to be ashamed of them!"

He had been becoming less and less recognizable, and now the last sign of his moral identity passed away.

"That is not all. Perhaps I do not know myself, and perhaps I am the evil-doer you think me, because now I am certain about nothing. I have done the best I could, and look at what has happened to me! What should I have done? After I had gone so far through life successfully, now comes God and spoils it all! How can a man live, once God goes back on him?"

His tongue halted. For many sentences the unsuccessful patriarch had not been speaking to his peers, but to the air, the light, to something divined by him. However, there were mortals to reply, and instantly, in an outburst of sincere horror:

"What is he driving at? Does he mean that his teachings to his children have miscarried?"

"He means nothing; he is beside himself. That is the kindest thing that you can say of him."

"He has always thought that he and the Lord worked in partnership."

"Grief makes him act in this wild way."

"Yes; but first there was something for grief to work on. No man could be as righteous as he thought himself."

Although both Susanna and Jonathan were on the point of defending him, the continuation of his speech, during which he did not support himself by anything and stood as firmly as he had ever stood, made them silent with the rest.

"If you had wanted to behave like brothers, now would have been your time, for no man needs loyalty more than

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I; but instead, in your prosperity, you make this an occasion to instruct and blame me as you had no chance to do before. Therefore, since you are all so virtuous, I advise you not to associate with me, for if you do you may be contaminated, or you may find yourselves in the circle of wrath which now I occupy alone. Go! Every one of you! My land is damaged, but it is still my land; my house is a mournful house, but I own it! Do not set foot again on what is mine! Go, before I drive you out!"

The energy of his pose, when he had been so feeble for days, and of his speech, taxing the resources of the dialect as Hebrew patriarchs must have taxed theirs at times of reckoning, astonished his hearers so much that they could not obey him. Seeing them all motionless as if they refused to go, he ordered:

"Jonathan! You are the last of my sons. Get them out!"

Jonathan's one desire was to do anything on earth which that tragic man commanded; and as the others still did not relieve the situation, he made a movement to obey. No more was necessary; at once the room was full of large, black forms in motion. Cassandra went out first, her head high and red patches on her cheek-bones; Elias followed, weeping; Henrietta looked thunderstruck; and Heman unconsciously smiled. The last to go was Philip, who turned and waited for a relenting gesture; but the gesture, which was quickly made, repeated his eviction, and he walked out, unoffended.

Jonathan, whose part had consisted of frustrated efforts to aid, and of sympathy halting through lack of comprehension, now made another attempt to replace his father in the chair; but his help was not needed. The spasmodic strength had not yet died out of Job.

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“Now I shall go,” he announced.

“Not now,” said Susanna. “Sit down again.”

All his newly recovered faculties were at her service immediately. “What do you wish to talk about, Susanna?” he asked, with courtesy.

“Jonathan, go out of the room. Job, now the time has come to settle the account between you and me.”

Her countenance acquired no softness during the investigating look which passed between them, nor at his assent: “Say what you have to say; but while you speak, remember that we have been man and wife a long time.”

“We have. Our friends, including my sister, have just now been driven from our house with insults; and this, although it will be a great loss daily felt by me, you did to please yourself, Job, and I must take the consequences. There have been other consequences also for me to take.”

“Dear wife, what do you mean?”

“What have you done with my children? Now I have waited long enough upon your feelings, and I expect you to tell me in plain words what happened to Jesse and to Antony?”

“About Jesse I know no more than you; the reasons for not questioning Jonathan and Bertha were your reasons. These are the facts about Antony: he spent that day in drinking, and that night when he came home he acknowledged that Jesse’s condition was owing to him, but nothing further would he say. When I insisted he refused, with insults; and then he said that he intended to leave the Thal, and carried his insults so much further that I thoroughly chastised him. After that he walked away, and I went to meet the doctor. That is absolutely all that I know.”

“So you chastised him?”

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“He richly deserved it.”

“After it he walked away from his home in the dark, and walked over the edge of the quarry; and he is dead. I ask you, if you had treated my son Antony like a man, and not like an ill-disposed little boy, would this have happened? Would he not have been with us still?”

“That may be your view of it, Susanna; but at the most, you cannot charge me with the others. Jesse—”

“There is no doubt that the fight was over this girl. Who brought her into our home, where we were so happy?”

“Is it possible that you blame me for all this?”

“Look, Job! What is left of our home? Our friends are driven away; our daughter and our sons depart. All the shelters which we had for our old age are crumbling and breaking: the wealth which gives old people importance; our old, old friendships, which would have kept us from loneliness; our children, in whom we should have continued to live; they are all gone, and you have done it. Who did it, if not you?”

“Will you not agree that God has done it?”

“No. I never knew you to shirk responsibilities before. Do not try to put it off on God. Now, I have been patient for these five months, and I think that that is long enough. I intend to have my way.”

Job stared at her as if he did not know her, and did not interfere when she summoned Jonathan and told him to call Bertha. Jonathan looked from one of them to the other, and appealed to the girl to come quickly. “I think that both my parents are going mad, after what has happened to them,” he said.

Presently he was agonized because he had brought her. When she came in Job was still alert, and it would have

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been hard to perceive in eye and mouth the first small signs of a relaxation of the faculties more serious than the one from which he had just recovered.

Susanna sat beside him; hers was the seat of judgment, before which Bertha, the disintegrating force embodied, came to stand. She had made haste to be of whatever use she could, and her paleness was not for herself, nor had the tears been for herself which still showed on her lashes. Susanna's controlled fury leaped at those tears.

She said, "How dare you weep?"

Susanna was preponderant; but Bertha's clear look encountered her, and she returned, in the tone of an equal, "What do you mean?"

The elder woman did not condescend to answer, observing the other from her chair, and allowing her repulsion to be visible.

As this ordeal continued, Bertha made a series of lightning-quick guesses at the meaning of the scene, and gathered self-control, but not resentment. A veritable passion of pity for Job rendered her indifferent to herself; and she was ready to welcome severity when she thought, "What they say to me may not be just; but Jesse heard about Antony from me; and if they knew my part with Esther, all that they could say would be justified."

She had gotten so far when Susanna removed her eyes from her and, with acute insult, spoke across her to Job, as if she were a chattel:

"On the day when you first told me about her, I was afraid; it seemed to me then that you met trouble on the Blaueberg, and you did. See what has happened since she came! If you ask me how I know, I tell you that a mother understands her children's dangers. Would it have

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gone so with Esther if this other girl had not come to make her jealous? Would Jonathan have put aside our wishes for him and stayed at home if this new face had not decided him? And I know well whose doing it is that Jesse and Antony lie where they lie. She provoked that fight. Perhaps it is a relief to her that Antony is gone."

The whole statement was so detestably like truth! Nothing was clear to Bertha except the revelation of her complicity.

Susanna addressed her at last: "You have done enough here. Take your things and go. You hurt my eyes."

To the need for action her nature responded automatically. She did not know what to think, but she knew what to do.

"Mother, I will not have it!" Jonathan was saying. Bertha silenced him, and also stopped Susanna's contemptuous reply.

"I refuse to go."

"No doubt you would prefer to stay. I have still one son for you to ruin."

"Do you think that I would stay to force myself on him? To prove to you that I do not shall be a part—"

"Do you think that I would allow you another opportunity?" said Susanna, with a crushing imputation.

Beside this suddenly presented and absorbing problem of her complicity, attacks from without were insignificant; and she made her declaration quite thoughtfully:

"That such charges could be brought against me I never dreamed; but I see that they have a foundation. I will not leave this place until I have made amends for the injury which I have ignorantly done."

"What can you do? Only take yourself away!"

"I will not."

HEARTS CONTENDING

“Job, do you permit me to be tormented longer by this mischief-maker?”

“Mr. Heilig, can you, as a just man, deny me the right to do what I can to make up for what I have brought about most unconsciously?”

Jonathan put in, “Mother, she shall stay, or I will go too, in spite of everything,” but Susanna, waiting for Job’s answer, seemed not to hear him.

“Susanna, we cannot disallow her claim. She appeals to right and justice,” said Job.

“Now what am I to think when you turn out your brothers and my sister, and keep this girl in the house against my will? It seems that it is time for me to go!” exclaimed Susanna.

There was an opposition of set faces. Then Job said, “She shall stay.”

Jonathan repeated, “She shall stay.”

In his upper room Jesse’s bell rung, and Bertha, without a look to beg permission, went to wait on him.

Susanna proudly submitted.

XII

THE OWNER SITS UNDER THE APPLE-TREE

AT half-past four o'clock the sun was still high, and the Thal and the quiet mountains were covered with hot light. No more violent movement was perceptible than the straight rise of chimney-smoke undisturbed by any wind; the cows in pasture changing their feeding-places; and the slow progress of a farm-wagon driven by a boy and accompanied by a cloud of dust. Flaunting on its stalks along the road-side, as if it longed to dance away, the orange-colored butterfly-weed was the most restless thing in the valley.

There were no sounds of work; an inappropriate silence prevailed. As the flames had left them, the wheat-fields remained; the half-demolished barn walls were still standing, surrounded by ashes and various charred objects, and scenting the air with smoke; and a couple of wagons stood shelterless beside the road near where the wagon-shed had been. Job's one patch of rye had escaped the fire, owing to its situation in a far corner of the farm, but the heads were empty and brittle, the grain was already germinating on the ground, and that crop was gone as entirely as the wheat. The mill was closed. Every day customers came driving up, and drove away again, carrying their grain-sacks to other mills, and also carrying the news about the Heiligs.

HEARTS CONTENDING

The house had a peculiar expression. It was not shut up, as in a period of mourning, nor did it appear uninhabited; it looked as if it were the abode of expectationless beings not human who glided about their occupations; cheerful sounds and the odors of food would have been as much out of place there as in fields of asphodel. When Jonathan returned to it, he had not the feeling of coming home; and gazing at it now from the steps of the mill, and at all the defacing changes which grew more serious day by day, it seemed to him that nothing was as it had been except the light. To be head man in the Thal was what he would have wished for most; but the Thal, in passing from Antony's control to his, had become a forlorn charge. Hollow-eyed, dusty, and heavy in his boots, though he stood and told himself that circumstances would improve, he did not feel that they would.

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of steps, and he turned and saw coming along the road the trust-inspiring figure of Philip Heilig, who said, warmly:

“I am very glad to find you here. I wanted to have a little talk with you before I see your father.”

“For myself, you are the man I most want to see, Uncle Philip; but after what father said you ought not to be here.”

“I will explain my coming. In the mean time you can shake hands with me without disloyalty as a son.”

Jonathan did so, with a rush of cordiality, making haste, however, to conduct his uncle around the corner of the mill, after which he awaited the beginning of the conversation.

“How is Jesse?” Philip asked.

“Not worse; he talks a little sometimes. He has taken everything with wonderful self-possession.”

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“How is your mother?”

“Not sick.” Poor Jonathan could not report more cheerfully than by negatives. “She takes entire care of Jesse, and I have not seen her give way once; but— Probably you know that she was in the habit of walking all over the house every day, and I think that she had a Thanksgiving each time that she did it. She does it still. I suppose you understand what a thing it is to see.”

“I do. Now that all this has come on them when they are not young, what a good thing it is for your father and mother that they are together.”

Jonathan hesitated; what decided him to speak was the wish to make aware of the situation the only man who could possibly cope with it. “They are not together.”

“How so?”

“Mother has turned against father,” he began; and told the story as simply as possible, with slight mention of Bertha.

“And how has it been going since?” Philip inquired, stroking his beard.

“Ours is a frightful house. From morning to night hardly a word is said. Bertha keeps things going, but mother gives her no directions, and never seems to see her at all. Mother herself spends night and day in Jesse’s room and the room next to it.”

“How about your father? And why do you not begin the necessary work on the place?”

“Because father will not allow it. The place is as it is because he wants to have it so.”

“Do you think that he has gone crazy, Jonathan?”

“It looks so to me. Mother does not speak to him, nor he to her. He does not notice anything. In the morning

HEARTS CONTENDING

I help him to his chair, on the porch if it rains, under the Northern Spy apple-tree if it is pleasant; and there he spends the day. He is considering something constantly, and if I want to speak to him I have to address him several times to get his attention, and the interruption annoys him very much. Time and again I have tried to make him see the urgency of our business, and he will only listen long enough to forbid me to go ahead. For some reason of his own he has put an embargo on the Thal."

"What do you think it is that preoccupies him to this extent?"

"I don't know. It seems as if nothing should, with the farm in this condition. What is worse, he is growing weaker. He has fallen away inside his clothes, and he stoops like an old man. And before this he never would be sick half a day."

"Have you thought of going ahead without his permission?"

"I have tried it. I began to cut the rye myself, but I had to stop; and this afternoon I borrowed a horse—think of having to borrow a horse!—and went to see the only miller I can hear of who is out of a job. From him I got no satisfaction at all. It is evident that he does not want to come, and does not intend to come."

"Do you know why?"

"Yes; I got it out of him. We have had one fire started, and he thinks it likely that we shall have another, since some one has a grudge against us. He says he could not feel safe in the mill any night, and I can't blame him. All the trade will be gone long before Jesse gets up—if, indeed, he ever does. Please don't walk toward the house, uncle; father might see you."

UNDER THE APPLE-TREE

“If he did?”

“You will understand me when I say that I am half glad that I could not get the miller. Father is unlike anything you ever knew of him. I don’t want to see him so worn out as he was when he had finished forbidding me to go on with that rye.”

“That makes my business here more difficult, and also more necessary,” said Philip.

He did not state it at once. So many years had passed since he began to use his own life mainly as a standpoint from which to comprehend and assist the lives of other people, that he was able to do justice with sympathy to all who were involved in this emergency; and he now saw the homestead where he also had been born and brought up, and which he was forbidden to approach, as the scene of Promethean revolts against faith and fact. There was even something heroic about the young, thin, worried nephew.

Jonathan was restless in the pause, and ended it by saying, “You spoke of having some business, uncle.”

“Yes. This afternoon we had a meeting at Heman’s. We talked about the standstill here, which we had all heard of, and which we knew must have a serious cause; and they selected me to see your father, and tell him that we want to help him out. His work shall be done without giving him any care whatever. Elias volunteered to take charge of the rebuilding; Heman will lend horses until he can buy up as many good ones as you need to restock, and he and I shall look after the harvesting; the rye is probably done for, but the oats and buckwheat are ready for us. Your aunts will cook for the builders and the harvesters. You will be free to do whatever else needs to be done; for

HEARTS CONTENDING

instance, the fence-making. It will not be long until we have the Thal looking like itself."

"I dare say they would all enjoy acting the charitable, and telling my poor father about his sins and shortcomings," Jonathan answered.

"You are entirely mistaken there. They are more than willing—they are anxious to work hard for you out of pure good-will. Your Uncle Elias looks ten years older since this happened, and he regrets constantly the fact that he blamed your father; and Heman—"

"I have no doubt that Uncle Heman is willing to buy up horses for us. He would not lose by it."

"He is just as willing to leave his own work and come here to sweat in your buckwheat-field; he will not make much by that. All this is a great concession from elderly people who are used to respect, and who were turned out with insults. You had better include that side of it."

"There is more than kindness actuating Uncle Heman."

"If Heman thinks he can afford to make overtures, it is no wonder. We all appraised him as a poor scrub for a good many years, and he was shrewd enough to know it; and now he astonishes us all by paying cash for this immense new house. The fact is, that as soon as it became a question of giving your father practical assistance there was just one wish in the party. His acceptance of their offer is as important to them as it is to him, if in a less material way; and you are making a great mistake in your way of looking at it, my dear Jonathan."

"Very well. I shall tell father what you say immediately, and then you can judge whether you had better see him. I would do nearly anything to put a stop to this state of affairs. We are notorious. I feel the people I meet look-

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ing at me and wondering whether they dare question me; and I hear that we have been mentioned in two sermons, and that insurance men are busy making out fire-insurance policies for the neighbors; and I can well imagine how the old men moralize, and the courting couples talk us over."

"All that will soon end of itself. Now you go and lay this proposal before your father, and I shall wait here until you come back."

With a good deal of hope, and fixing his eyes eagerly upon his objective point, Jonathan went to present himself before his father under the apple-tree.

It was a very old tree; suited by much witnessing of life to be the shelter and companion of resultful meditation, the tree's traditional part. Under the low, thick branches grass could not grow, and the bare ground supported unevenly the wooden arm-chair in which Job sat. He was not leaning against the chair-back, and his hands and feet were squarely placed. His hands looked cold; his face was neither dull nor vacant, but completely changed.

Here was the embodiment of the arresting will which imposed itself upon the Thal. Not much but will was left of Job. Deductions had been made from the total of soul, mind, body, and property which composed the multiple entity Job Heilig, and his potentialities were decreased, even in the direction of the years he had to live. The expression of the primitive residuary qualities had altered his countenance.

His son approached and waited to be invited to speak, feeling the baffled pity which he always felt at this sight. After he had waited some time, and had moved to a position directly in front of Job, he said, "Father," and repeated it.

"Well?"

HEARTS CONTENDING

He proceeded quickly, before he should lose the attention thus attracted: "Uncle Philip is here, and wants supper."

"Did you not hear me send him out of my house?"

"Yes, father; but he asks your permission to come into it again."

"I refuse it."

"He came on foot, he is three miles from home, and he is hungry."

"He can go as he came. If he is hungry, take out a cup and plate to him. I will not have him here. What gives you the right to expect me to speak twice?"

"He has something to say from my aunts and uncles. They are all sorry for what has happened, and they want to assist you, so they ask you to allow them to do your heavy work. Each one has undertaken a share—"

"So? Jonathan, you seem to think that since your brothers are out of business, you are sole owner. These people shall not come here before you carry me away; and I advise you to remember that I can put you out, both before and after that event takes place. I am not incapable of testing, however it may look to you. Now go."

When Jonathan, in spite of dejection and shame, had stated this result to his uncle, Philip disregarded his embarrassed suggestions for making the journey home easier, and put minute questions. "It is hard to believe," he said. "My eldest brother! He must be in a bad way. I think that I shall walk over and see him now."

"That will only make it worse; and do not, on any account, come on him unexpectedly. The one of you who does that assumes a bad responsibility; I honestly believe that it would be his end. When he made me leave him just now he was shaking and sweating. Let the Thal go.

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We have enough to live if the mill is idle and the crops wasted; and if we had not, all belongs to father."

"Very well. For the present I shall make no effort to see him, and I shall dissuade the others from doing so; but in my opinion, Jonathan, there has been altogether too much keeping silent here to avoid trouble. A little sensible talk is what is needed. Now, good-bye, and don't get too down-hearted."

Philip departed quickly; and Jonathan, feeling hopeless of anything, decided to go into the house. Bertha was there. They were thrown together incessantly now, and intercourse was difficult, because he never saw her without the impulse to demand that she promise herself to him, and because he believed that her unbroken gentleness toward himself was a cover for contempt. He turned dark red; but, as he leaned, without any designs in his mind, upon the forlorn table which she had spread for him alone, it occurred to him that, though she was nothing more, she was the nearest thing to a friend that he possessed. Merely for the comfort of telling it to her, he recounted the offer and his father's rejection.

"I must do something," he concluded, "and I see neither what nor how. It is bad, bad, bad!"

"I have been thinking about the work which should be done immediately," said she.

"Do you think that I should go ahead against father's express orders?"

"I do not—not after what happened when you tried to cut the rye. If you could, what would you do first?"

"There is no proper beginning. The barn should be rebuilt, the grain cut, new stock bought, and the mill opened, all at once; but there is no use in thinking about it."

HEARTS CONTENDING

As he watched her his eyes implored, "Oh, Bertha, be a little generous with yourself to a man tied down!" but hers slipped from his gaze as smoothly as always. Presently she went out and did not come back, and when he looked for her she was sitting beside his father. Disgusted with himself for having put her to flight, he came out on the porch ostentatiously, and took himself away.

She saw him go, but she did not move from where she was sitting, on the bare earth, with her hands clasped before her knees. The same look of energetic contemplation appeared in her face and in Job's, forming an element of likeness between vigorous, sudden age and resplendent youth. The object of his mental labor was his secret; hers had to do with his persuadableness and the best method of convincing him. He was a formidable mystery to her, with his silence and his power to halt and terminate.

After a time the feeling that she was looked at caused her to raise her eyes, which had been fixed on the ground, and she saw him watching her. She rejoiced, hoping that he would speak a word, and keeping her eyes fixed upon his with an eliciting look. The word came:

"Poor girl!"

In her eagerness to have him speak she said nothing, lest she should stop him.

"From your own troubles you came into ours. So much trouble is hard on a young woman. And when you were told that you had done harm here, you undertook to make it right. You are a good girl!"

It was her unhoped-for chance. Even addressing him without prefix in order not to interrupt his mood, she said, "May I do what I can to make it right?"

She was his protégée; he regarded her leniently. "You

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must not think of that as a promise. It was said in haste, and you cannot perform it. Put it out of your mind; or, if you are conscientious about it, I release you herewith."

"I do not want to be released. Let me try to make the Thal a flourishing place once more. Will you let me?" she asked, rather like a suggestion to his mind than a request.

"You could do nothing."

"The damage is not beyond repair."

"You think that it is a great thing if life remains. You look at it from near the beginning, I from near the end."

She could not answer this, but she did not cease looking at him with more insistent trust than ever.

"You are sensible and grateful; I am inclined to speak to you. I suppose you wonder why I do not attend to my own property. I shall tell you. As a woman your duty is to think as your father or as your husband thinks, and you attain by them to right opinions. Then your father and your husband must be wonderfully careful to be right in their opinions, because you are following them: this is their duty. You see that. I have a wife and children, two younger brothers, tenants and emulators, who depended on me. All went well; my way was the right way. Now—no more." He paused, contemplating the break in that old habit of success. "Consequently, it is necessary for me to readjust myself. I am wrong, and do not know where I am wrong. If I am an impious man, then nothing in the world is of importance to me until I correct myself. If there is pleasure for the One above in destroying what we put our short lives into building up, then there is no sense in preparing Him the materials for another joke. I intend to understand this; and until I know what action is

HEARTS CONTENDING

reasonable, I will not proceed; and my son Jonathan, for whose course I am responsible, shall not proceed either."

The demand for rationality exhilarated her. Unable to respond adequately, she allowed her countenance and her silence to reply; then she again broached what was her present duty, as the search for rectitude was his.

"I will not disturb you, and I will not hurt anything. I have thought of ways. Let me try what I can do here in the Thal."

"You cannot hurt anything. There are not many more ways in which I can be hurt."

"Ah, give me your permission! Think of me. It has been said that I brought all this about!"

Job gave her a quick, understanding look. "You are a good girl—a good, proud girl. Try what you can. Go, now."

In a few minutes he was absorbed again, and she withdrew without haste; but when she had reached the house she was very quick, for there was another opportunity which might be lost. She quietly sped up-stairs. The opportunity was not lost. Susanna was shut in the room next to Jesse's, where she could be heard preparing for the night, and Jesse was therefore alone. Having made sure of this, she opened his door and stole in.

The blinds had been rolled to the top of the windows, and he lay in a glare of late, red sunlight. Her first movement was to give him the mercy of shade; she was, indeed, afraid to look at him; but he summoned her. Then, as she had not provoked Susanna by coming near him since the day of the funeral, his improvement was very evident to her. Emaciated as he was, his appearance no longer precluded thoughts of life; it expressed an eager gripping at

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life, rather; and he spoke to her, too, differently enough from his usual fluency, but not as if it were impossible for him to speak.

“Do not shut out the sun. Come here. Why have you not been here before?”

“Were you able to have me?”

“No one comes except, once in two or three days, Jonathan for a minute. Mother tells me nothing; will not talk herself, and shuts me up. Why is she so tongue-tied? And why do I hear no sounds of work?”

“Probably she thought that you were not well enough to talk. You hear no sounds of work, because nothing has been begun yet. Your father has not decided on his plans.”

“That is strange. However, father gives the law here. Now tell me about Antony. You may as well tell me. Where I have been, since that morning in the wheat-field, they know things.”

“Nobody can tell the full history of that night. I have heard no one speak of seeing Antony between his appearance in this room and the time when your father found him.”

“Did you not see him?”

“From this room I went straight to mine, and stayed there.”

As he arranged this in his mind, she observed that he had less the look of physical ill than of one bereaved.

“Antony intended to go West,” he resumed. “I was to follow him. When I can leave this bed, I will go West.” He said it as if he were glad to announce it, as a first step.

“You will leave us all?”

“I will go West. He wanted you.”

HEARTS CONTENDING

Her glance in reply was non-declarative.

“Yes.” The pauses and strength-economizing brevity did not agree with the intense animation of his eyes. “He did; and you would not. You did not want Antony when he wanted you! Lord! I wonder what you do want!”

“That is what I came to tell you.”

Both listened; and on hearing in the next room reassuring, unhastened sounds, they returned to each other. “Will you tell me how to run your mill?”

“Why?” he demanded, in amazement; and when in the fewest and least perturbing words she had told him what she thought he might safely know, he said, “How on earth did you induce father to allow you?”

“Will you help me?”

“In every way I can. Oh, here I must lie! Why do you undertake all this?”

“It has been shown to me that I have made mischief in the Thal.”

“You have,” he answered, exhibiting pleasure in the veracity of the statement. “It is wonderful what you are responsible for. I suppose you are no witch; you are not what one looks for in a witch; but—the fire took place on a moonlight night. Did you stand out in the grain-fields and call down flame upon them out of the cold moon? And as for Antony— Witch! Witch!”

His voice wore out; with difficulty he raised his hand high enough to bury the forefinger in the hair on her forehead.

She paid no attention to this, suddenly forgetting herself as she looked at the non-combatant who had gone under.

“Dear Jesse!” she said. “You will live?”

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"I have been requested to do so. Besides, I want to see how you will make out. I told you I would go West. In the Thal it has always been unfashionable to take life easily; and now you are getting into action, too, and there will be less room than ever." He smiled at her out of his sunshine.

XIII

PAYMENT BEGINS

ON the next afternoon there arrived a lad riding a lean, bare-backed horse, with a bag of corn and oats to be ground immediately. He had not yet passed a night anywhere except on a mountain-farm seven miles from the Thal, so a visit to the mill was a social event for him; there he met strangers and gathered news, and all the family at home listened until he had told it, and he was of more importance than at any other time. As he took his departure he was pleased, because this was the most interesting trip that he had ever made, and sorry that the family would almost certainly not believe what he had to tell.

To Bertha, who watched his unimposing retreat along the road, he appeared effulgent, for he was her first customer. Work had begun in the Thal. The water in the race had been impotently shallow since the day when Jesse was carried home, but the gauge now registered a working depth, and there was a powerful flow in and out of the arches in the thick stone mill walls; the rope-and-chain tackle for hoisting grain-bags was still in the position in which it had just been used; and the drift of the air carried through the large open doorway a thin cloud of fresh flour. The building was full of noises: corn rattled incessantly from a wooden trough into a wooden hopper; the

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grindstones kept up a steady, whirring roar; the wheel splashed below. Bertha had been discovering the mill's diversities of character. On the first floor, where the troughs and hoppers were, it was businesslike; the old grindstones leaning against the wall had been worn out by business; but the wooden pillars, hewn from logs with a broad-axe and used in a much older mill, connected it with the past. Even on a hot July afternoon the small mill-room did not entirely lose the social air imparted by many gatherings of Jesse's friends on winter evenings, during which the stove was red-hot and pipes were smoked and the talk was parti-colored. The ground floor was so nearly dark that it would have been possible inadvertently to walk into the deadly looking race, in which the old wooden wheel went round and round. This place struck Bertha's imagination: she fancied how it would look after many years, when the walls were falling and the still wheel and stagnant race were ghostly on moonlight nights, and she herself was dead. Among the sounds of life-sustaining industry, and with the smell of the freshly ground corn growing stronger, the idea was no more than a pleasant contrast.

She stood studying the apparatus, accompanying her slow glance with a *résumé* of the workings of each part; their dependence upon her was a sign of her progress beyond her position of yesterday. The afternoon light among the brown pillars displayed her well: her lips looked rosier for it; her compactly arranged hair brighter; in her determined concentration she was rather statuelike. So she was standing, not having been able to hear his approach, when Jonathan saw her through the doorway. His mind was intent, but at the sight of her his heart leaped of itself.

HEARTS CONTENDING

"Bertha!" he exclaimed, as her presence furnished an incredible answer to the question he was about to put. "I was astonished to see the water running from the creek into the race, and to hear the mill in operation. Who has taken charge of it?"

"I."

"Please tell me who is here?" He required by a look a serious answer.

"No one but ourselves. You seem to have been working hard, and it was not in the Thal. Where have you been all day?"

In spite of his eagerness to be doing the questioning, he gave her the conversational right of way. "I must have work, so I have hired myself out to help harvest other people's oats and buckwheat. I got my first job last night, and went to it this morning."

"Perhaps I could give you work if you applied to me."

This was the first time in weeks that she had laughed; and after it she said, with a very placating manner: "It will be so bad for the business if the mill remains closed. Last evening I sent a message to the man who would not take the place, and curiosity brought him, as I counted on it to do; and he has shown me how to manage everything. Since he went away I have dealt with one customer, so you see that it is not impossible; and I am going to be the miller."

"You could not handle the sacks—"

"I shall take them slowly, and I am no weakling."

"The gearing and the wheel must be looked after. I don't know how, but my brother was always busy with them."

"The miller offered to come for that purpose as often as it is necessary."

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“What do you think my father will say?”

“I have his permission.”

“His permission to run the mill?”

“To do anything I can to restore the Thal. My idea is—”

“Please don’t go on. Do you imagine that I would allow you to do anything of that sort?”

“Your father allows me.”

“My father insults me; that permission should have been mine. But the important thing is to get you away as quickly as possible from this idea.” He spoke as if it were a physical degradation.

“I don’t see why you could not let me—if you were the one to let me.”

“If you don’t see it is because you won’t. Could I sit by in idleness while you do my work—when, if I had my way, you should not lift your hand? If I could, it should never be hot or cold for you. You certainly know that. I should like to know how many men have said the same to you.”

This first statement of love by him was made and met savagely. “You overcome me. Feelings so flattering expressed with such tenderness—how can I reply to them?”

During the next minute they encountered each other through their eyes in a new character; then he said, with a manner as if he were steering: “Bertha, I deserve that, and I know very well that, as you have gone about the house in your quiet way, you have been despising me. Now I want you to listen.”

She did not stop him, and ceased to look at him.

“I saw you for the first time when I was undecided whether to comply with my father’s wishes and remain away from home, or with my own, and come back here to

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live; and the sight of you decided me. There has not been a day since that I have not thought of you; but I had nothing to offer you, and that kept me from laying claim, even that morning in the wheat-field. Now, although I am worse off than ever, I must have it clear between us."

She awaited the question.

"I want you so much that I am not ashamed to offer myself to you. Will you accept me?"

Although he thought that he recognized in her face triumph and modest joy and regret successively, they were so suppressed and so fugitive that he could be sure of none of them; and her powerful silence deepened the impression first made upon him when they walked together on the April afternoon, that she would act in accordance with immaterial standards of her own, of which he could foretell nothing.

"Bertha," he recalled her, making an endearment of the name.

She said, "No, I cannot do that," and added no thanks.

"Bertha, I need you."

"How could you possibly need me?"

He did not notice that her tone exalted him. "How could I need you?" he repeated, and said no more for a while, only looked at her. "Can't you?" he said, with difficulty.

At that she lifted her hand in a self-protective gesture to brush the quiver from her lips. "I cannot."

"Don't you care at all for me?"

"I care to do what I have undertaken to do."

He waited, with the hope that she would say something on which he could base a plea.

PAYMENT BEGINS

"I want you to understand me," she did say, "and I want you to help me. You heard what I promised your mother, and it is time for me to begin to do what I promised. I intend to run the mill, grinding on certain days. We must engage a contractor to rebuild the barn, and men to do the harvesting, and the harvesters and masons must be fed. I shall cook for them, and keep the house going. The restocking, however, is beyond me. I ask you to undertake that, and the fence-making. Will you?"

"You take everything into your own hands," said he, quietly.

"Once I was afraid to take something into my own hands, and I have been sorry ever since, for harm came of it. It happened here."

"What harm?"

"I helped your sister Esther to leave home." She supplied the details when he questioned her.

Without comment on the information, he said, still quietly: "Don't you think it a good deal to assume—the responsibility for all these calamities among people strange to you? And there are a number of ways to look at it: for instance, it is mere chance that Jesse was struck by Antony, and not by me. I have no doubt that I could trace the whole succession to my wanting you if I were inclined to do so."

"I never thought of other ways to look at it," she said, meekly. "I don't believe that I should have considered myself the cause of the trouble if your mother had not done so; but she did. So, you see, I must pay for it. I dare not think of what you say."

He thought that she was yielding to argument, and proceeded: "This idea of payment—explain it to me."

HEARTS CONTENDING

"I owe for you and Antony and Esther and Jesse. I owe your mother."

In the short silence her face grew radiant under his eyes from the vision which followed her own words, of frustrating the destruction in the Thal, and compensating the elderly mother; it seemed to her as if her spirit would go on to pay if her body died before it was done. "How could I think of anything but that?" she exclaimed.

"All my happiness is in you, Bertha."

"I want to think of nothing but what I have set myself to do. I want to pay my debt and wash my hands and go. Do you think that I would settle down here where I should be unwelcome—detested?"

"I must call your attention to one fact," said he, fiercely: "you and I cannot be here together. It is too much for flesh and blood."

It brought her up short for a minute; but the eager, glowing sweetness of her eyes melted that mood of his as winter obstacles melt in a flood of warm, sunny air. He did not know whether he was with her or against her.

"Jonathan!" She had never called him this before. "My heart is set on this reparation. Perhaps I am in the wrong, and presumptuous, as you say; but I can do nothing else. I am clamped down to it. I cannot accomplish it without you. Now, will you help me?"

"My God! What will square it for you?"

"I don't yet know all of it, but on the day when the account is squared I will go, and I know it will be soon; luck will be with me. Then you will be rid of me. Can I count on you?"

He nodded, staring at her. "You imagine that your going is what I want!"

P A Y M E N T B E G I N S

She walked away a few steps, stopped, and walked composedly back. "I have another thing to ask—an important thing. As soon as I have gone, tell your mother how I answered you to-day. I owe her no more on your account. My answer pays that."

XIV

THE SECOND INSTALMENT

SUSANNA had fallen asleep in a chair by her bedroom window. There was nothing to disturb her: quiet inside, and outside the peaceful, after-sunset sounds of hens clucking and birds chirping while they settled for the night, and distant voices from the creek, of men bathing; so she slept soundly, with her head against the window-frame. Her hair was now gray, and tendons showed in her neck behind her large gold ear-hoops. Although she was asleep, she looked as if she were making a great effort, for she was dreaming an exhausting dream. In the dream everything in the Thal was as it had been, and Antony himself was in his room; at the same time she knew that she was dreaming, and that she must get to him before she awoke; and she was trying to hurry.

She was not able to keep herself from waking before she saw him, and with a sensation like that imputed to a child when it is born she found herself again in her damaged world. Without changing her position or raising her head, she sat thinking and collecting her realizations, while the placidity won in sleep relapsed into undemonstrative bitterness made more bitter by the desire that time should turn back. It would have been easier to keep on living, it seemed to her half awake, if she could have gotten to see

THE SECOND INSTALMENT

Antony; and the happiness of seeing him in a dream might have been allowed her if Providence were not wanton.

It was some time before she noticed that she had been aroused by the voices of her sons, who were talking in Jesse's room with the door ajar. Her attention was attracted by a question from Jesse: "Where does she get the necessary money?"

"That is another good thing. Father lets her come to him for it; and he has made no objection to anything that has been done, not even when he saw me working. He seems satisfied to let her manage while he sits and thinks over whatever it is that occupies him. What can you tell me about mother?" said Jonathan.

Evidently they had known her to be asleep, and spoke so low in order not to awake her; but she heard every word.

"No improvement," Jesse answered. "Mother leaves these two rooms only when it is absolutely necessary; she never talks to me about what has happened; and you see how she looks. Does she notice father?"

"No. I hoped that she would begin to be a little more like herself with you. In my opinion she is the danger-point now. It is all harder on her than on any one else. Poor mother!"

"How are you getting along?" Jesse asked, in a friendly way.

"Under her direction: each morning she tells me what she wants done, and at the end of the week she pays me. She is a wonder. At least once a day she goes to the barn and to the fields, and walks about among the men and talks to them, and they wear themselves out to please her. Your mill is in good shape; and while the house does not look quite as usual, it does very well, and the men are well fed.

HEARTS CONTENDING

Our old cook-stove never found itself going at such strange hours as now; last night it was midnight when she stopped baking."

Susanna noted that in the Thal *she* no longer meant the wife and mother.

Jesse was saying: "I should think that you were superfluous, and I too; she makes us look like poor souls. How do you like taking orders from her?"

The listener desired to hear her son express detestation, but nothing stronger came than, "I am wonderfully glad to see the Thal coming back to life, but I can scarcely stand not being the one to bring it about."

"You did the best you could, considering father. Won't you keep on under her?"

"I certainly will."

"I am glad of it. For my part, when I get up she may give me orders from morning until night. I never heard of such a woman."

During a pause, recuperative for Jesse, Susanna understood what had not been so plain before: that she alone composed one of two factions in the house. Of all her men not one was left to her except the memory of Antony.

"It has been a strange business altogether. Look at what we were six months ago, and how it is now: the changes are greater than should have taken place in thirty years. There seems to be no sense in it," said Jonathan.

"You are right. Death and damage, and father and mother as they are. It is like a crazy dream."

"Jesse, I have done a deal of thinking about this. Do you bear a grudge against me for what happened to you in the wheat-field?"

"Surely not. Grudges are too heavy to carry about,"

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answered Jesse, soberly. "Anyhow, you did not touch me."

"You don't blame her?"

"She was blameless; as blameless as Antony, who hit me through pure bad luck. None of you could have acted differently from the way you did. When one knows that, one has easy going through the world; besides, this gives us a good chance to show what we are."

Nothing followed; apparently Jesse had exhausted himself. But Susanna did not need more, since she had heard the blame of his injury taken from Antony. After moving her chair as if she were just waking, she went into the other room, taking pains to reassure them by yawning and a sleepy countenance when she saw that they were in consternation lest she should have heard. As she did so she suggested a classic statue, open-mouthed, representing loud mourning. She made some additions to Jesse's comfort and questioned Jonathan about his day, with the shielding, maternal manner which they had long missed. She bade Jonathan stay there until her return, and even smiled good-bye to them from the door, at which they looked at each other hopefully; but she felt far away from them. Antony, freed from blame for Jesse, was much nearer. It seemed that she might find him in his old room, as she had dreamed; or, perhaps, he would come with no tread to meet her in the twilight; though, she thought, he would come better in the heat and light of August noon—no sunshine would be too strong for that strong ghost.

She was about to take her daily walk through the house, and she meant to end it with his room. This evening she recollected even more clearly than usual how everything had looked before the Heilig luck was broken, especially

HEARTS CONTENDING

on the afternoon of the day when the strange woman first became important to them; then the twilight had been as quiet as it was now, but the absent ones were coming back. There was only one place where what she remembered harmonized with what she saw: that was the garret, where there was no more than the regular change between winter and summer storing; but when from a window she saw the transformation in the landscape, she felt as if she were being shouldered out of her home. The Thal had been the result of years of consultation, work, and love, and she and Job had made it together for their children; now she looked at the fields, harvested under a stranger's direction; the mill, where she presided; and the barn, beginning to rise to do her credit; and as she looked Bertha's builders came gayly up from the creek and went into the shedding where they slept on straw; and when she could no longer see them, she heard them singing. Her steps regular, her thoughts arid, she walked through all the unused bedrooms except one, and through the first-floor rooms. She observed, in the kitchen, rearrangements to suit the stranger's convenience and signs of hasty housekeeping; but she touched nothing, and did not wipe the dust from her clock, although the clock in her memory was like luminous satin when the sun was on it. In the bedroom of the master and mistress, where she had not lain since the night of the fire, she felt the peculiar grief of exile imposed by the exile's nature alone. From there she went to Antony's room.

When the door opened with a lonely sound, she thought: If she should see him!

The room smelled musty and looked forsaken, and she seated herself on the chest, with her gray face bent forward,

THE SECOND INSTALMENT

and recalled her luxurious dream. Now, except in memory, Antony was not.

Solitude could be endured no longer by her, and the sympathy and partisanship which her sister would give, even before she explained why she needed them, were the greatest comfort that she could get. So far she had foregone that comfort, but this evening she did not care whether Job opposed her or not: she was ready to walk past him without answering. She did walk out of Antony's room and out of the house, and without meeting any one she took the road to the east.

Since the day when she accompanied her son she had not been on the road, and it seemed so strange to be there that she did not want to answer the salutations of the few people who peered to see who she was in the dusk. The first sight of Henrietta's new house, which was well advanced in the building, made her feel stranger still by marking how long she had been away: the old house looked hardly more than a toy beside it. There was no light or motion about the place, except a lamp burning in an upper room and a small figure skipping on the grass by the roadside all alone. It was too dark for Susanna to see the skipping-rope.

When little Susanna recognized her aunt, she threw her arms around her as high up as she could reach, and she was kissed because she had not changed. "Father has gone for horses. Mother is putting the others to bed. I ran away," she recounted.

"Will you tell her that I am waiting for her?"

"I ran away."

"If you say that I am here, she will not scold you. Will you be a good girl and tell her?"

HEARTS CONTENDING

The child hurried with the talismanic sentence, and Susanna felt afraid, for Henrietta might disappoint her; but in a moment she was there, with as eager an embrace as the little one's, and exclaiming: "My dear, dear sister! Come in!"

"To-night I can see no one but you. Come with me."

Susanna led the way into a small wood which was beside the road near the new house, and there the two sat on a log together. Now, after being sealed up in herself so long, she could say anything, but she wanted to hear first. She was told that Heman had refused to interfere further with Job, and that Elias was silently unhappy over the estrangement, and Cassandra over him; and that Philip thought that Job would make advances if he were left to himself for a while. Then Susanna became the speaker. She finished by saying:

"It is worse in my house than you can imagine. Job, Jonathan, and Jesse are given over to this girl, to whom Job permits everything. Was I not the one to direct the reconstruction if he could not? But I am displaced."

"How can you have her in your sight? I should put her off the place with my own hands."

"I dare not do that, on account of Job and Jesse."

"When we were girls together and talked about being married, we never thought of anything like this."

"No one ever thought of anything like this. However, I have still three good things left to me. I have you—"

"You will have me always."

"Now I am sure of that—and Jesse is growing better, and Antony is free from blame. I had him once, so I am not destitute. He was all that I wanted him to be."

Henrietta had been holding her sister's hand and speak-

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ing tenderly, all the animation subdued out of her; now she answered, quickly and quite loudly, "I know he was."

There was a pause, in which both women got ready for a new difficulty introduced by an impulsive tone.

"What do you mean, Henny?" asked Susanna.

"I was only agreeing with you," her sister answered, anxiously.

"More than that: I heard it in your voice, which sounded angry at a third party. You have heard something against Antony, and I want to know what it is."

Henny tried to get out of it; but Susanna insisted: "What is it? I have been left in the dark many times of late, and I intend to know this. I shall probably imagine something worse than the truth if you don't tell me."

"It is something which no sensible person would believe. Some say that Antony started that fire."

"That Antony started the fire!" Susanna repeated, in a wondering voice. "Do they say that?"

"Yes."

"Why, she did it!"

"Bertha?"

"The one who has done us all the mischief. You might know."

Susanna rose to her feet and brushed away the clinging dirt of the log from her dress. "I must go back now," she said.

Henrietta held her tight. "Do Job and the boys know this?"

"I suppose any one would know it who was in the house at the time and does a little thinking."

"Why did she do it?"

"Why has she done any of the things she has done?"

HEARTS CONTENDING

Perhaps she intended that it should be blamed on Antony. And now she makes a great show of trying to repay us."

"And she remains in your house?"

"None of them would give her up, I tell you. It is not one; it is all of them."

Henrietta still held her sister. Presently she said: "Listen! This shall not continue. I would allow it for no woman whom I thought well of, least of all for you. I will come to-morrow morning, and I will bring Cassandra with me, and we shall see whether right-thinking women can do something with these men. Do you consent to this?"

"You will remember that they are both feeble?"

"Oh yes, I shall remember that they are both feeble!"

"Then I shall welcome you."

Susanna would go back alone, and on foot. The way seemed short, and when her sons saw her they did not know what to make of her abstracted, sparkling look, which was still there in the morning. She was as if swept along by the hours, and she was glad, and willing to go wherever her present impetus landed her. Much vitality was used up by her in ardent listening for the approach of her sisters.

There was not long to wait. Before the dew was dry they drove up to the front door, and she hurried out to welcome them.

Conscience-supported energy was in the bearing of all three; the call to action had eliminated the antagonism between Henrietta and Cassandra, and the former looked more than usually quick of resource, the latter as if she could make a few resources go far. Not waiting to get out of the carriage, Henrietta leaned over to say:

"Two of my children heard me tell Heman's contractor

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that—you know who—started that fire. This morning it will go through the school, and at noon the parents will begin to hear it. It is suitable that it should be spread from the school. My older children did not want to go there after the teacher talked about the troubles of their uncle Job, to illustrate something which he read to them out of the Bible."

Susanna's eyes glowed. She conducted her allies into the parlor, and asked them how they preferred to begin, ceremoniously.

"Where is Jonathan?" Henrietta asked.

"Gone away on some of her business. You need not consider him; she has him fast."

"Then we must try what plain talk will do with the others," said Cassandra. "Henrietta, you and Jesse were always friendly; you will have more influence there. I shall speak with Job, over whom my husband is getting old with worry."

Susanna remained alone, enjoying the comfort of having some one to do for her, imagining many ways that each interview might be taking, and awaiting their return with calmness. They came together; and as neither spoke, she said:

"Does Jesse consent to turn her out?"

"No."

"Does Job?"

"No."

There was a pause, brief, but in it a first defeat was accepted and put behind them. The others awaited her account from Henrietta, who looked baffled.

"I was so glad to see Jesse," she said, "and he seemed to be glad; he and I were always friends. His appearance

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shocked me; and that he is on the road to recovery proves to me that nothing is hopeless. He wanted to hear all that has been going on, and I told him the news of the neighbors; and he said that he had never known until now how pleasant it is to be a miller, seeing strangers from all quarters and hearing everything; and he asked me to tell him more. I said I had a good deal more to tell him. I gave him the whole story of what has happened here, and showed him what this girl has done; and his only remark was: 'So Bertha burned the barn? What fool started that notion?'

"'Jesse,' I said, 'if you insist that she must go, she will go.' And just then he shut his eyes and began to gasp. I wanted to bring him water or whiskey, or do anything I could for him, but he would not have it; he told me that he needed rest only, and he asked me to leave him."

Susanna hurried out of the room, and Cassandra said to Henrietta, in a low voice:

"Did you believe in that?"

"I can't think that Jesse was playing a trick."

"He only wanted to get rid of you."

He was sleeping, Susanna reported when she came back; and Cassandra's account was asked.

She said: "I found Job sitting under a tree, doing nothing. He did not want to listen to me, and I began by telling him how his brother takes this to heart, and that we all want so much to see him prospering again, and that we miss him. That did no good. Then I told him what is being said against Antony, and I begged him, for your sake, Susanna, and for the credit of the family, and in justice to his dead son, to send away this mischief-making girl. Nothing seemed to strike him until I spoke of her starting the fire, and then I thought he would act imme-

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diately, for he got up, and said: 'Cassandra, you go. This is no business for women. Women have had too much to do in it already.'

"Whatever he intended, he postponed it, and sat down again; but he would hear nothing more. Now I want to know, are all these men bewitched?"

"Men need no more bewitching than such a face can do," Henrietta said, bitterly. "Now what, Susanna?"

"What would you do?"

"Leave him. Come to me. You have a home with me."

"Would you leave Jesse as he is now, if you were his mother?"

"I would take him with me; and I would walk out of this cursed house, and I would never come back."

"What do you advise, Cassandra?" Susanna proceeded.

"The same. Such insults as are put upon you no woman should endure."

"It surprises me that you have stood it as long as this," said Henrietta, "though I can see that you would put up with much, being so sorrowful and so alone; but if you continue, I shall think that you do not know when you are insulted."

"Do I not?" Susanna answered. "Do you think it does not burn me?"

"I should rather see Elias dead than have him treat me as Job treats you," said Cassandra. "With my husband I must be first; but all women are not alike."

"If you submit longer, our mother would have been ashamed of you," Henrietta added.

"There is, however, one thing left to try," Cassandra said, presently, in a more ordinary manner: "Job is the

HEARTS CONTENDING

one to blame throughout; and it is possible that this girl, who is young enough to be the daughter of any one of us, would go of herself if we put the case to her. Then in time, while it would never be as it was, it would still be better than if you leave, Susanna. Let us try the girl."

After some looking into each other's faces, Henrietta said to her sister:

"No, let me call her. She is the one to blame, in my opinion, and not Job; but we can try her."

It was necessary to hunt for Bertha, who was picking beans in the blazing sun; and the summons was delivered in a manner which caused her to follow immediately, expecting something hostile. Her movements were jerky from overstrained nerves, for she had been working since dawn as fast as it was possible for her to work, and at tasks exhaustingly miscellaneous. When the three women had her before them, they looked at her for an appreciable time, during which their expressions did not change and hers reached a climax. The lead was taken by Cassandra:

"Bertha, we remember from our own youth that a young woman often does wrong through inexperience, when, if those who are older would explain to her in the way of kindness, she would be glad to do differently. We think that it is fair to you to have a talk with you, since your mother is not here; and I believe that you will take the course which your parents, who were good people, would have wanted you to take."

After a glance at the other two for enlightenment, Bertha said to Cassandra:

"Whatever you have to say to me, Mrs. Heilig, so much is fairly said. I shall be glad to do what I can to please you."

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“That is a good beginning. You know how, out of the kindness of their hearts, my brother and sister gave you a home. Don’t you think that you ought to go away, willingly and making them no trouble, when they ask you to do so?”

“Yes, Mrs. Heilig, certainly; but they have not asked me.”

“I ask you now, on their behalf.”

“Why do they not do it?”

Cassandra hesitated to make the demolishing reply to such a young, fair-minded opponent, and the hesitation lost her the lead. Bertha addressed Susanna:

“Do you tell me to go?”

“I told you weeks ago, and you have not forgotten it.”

“I have not. Since then, no one else having been able to do so, I have brought it about that your crops are harvested, your stock is replenished, your barn is rising higher daily, and your mill is run. I have kept your house going, cooked your food and washed your clothes, and made it possible for you to stay with your son Jesse day and night, and nurse him back into this world. It is thanks to me that you have had time to think hard things of me.”

Throwing herself forward in her chair, Henrietta interposed, rapidly: “There has been enough of this. Don’t answer her, Susanna.”

Bertha passed her over with a look, and said to Cassandra: “Mr. Heilig, you have spoken kindly to me, and I say to you that the moment your brother, who first employed me, tells me to go, I shall go. If he has no further use for me, why does he not say so?”

“Your employer is not himself now,” Cassandra began. But Henrietta, who had been biting her lips, broke in again:

HEARTS CONTENDING

"I cannot stand this exchanging words. Susanna, it is time for you to go with me. This girl has no intention of leaving what she has got."

"Listen," Bertha said to her. "I have known you as a good woman, and I believe that you can understand what I feel and what I am trying to do. I know well how friendless I was when I was taken into this house—when I forgot that, may I forget everything else too. There has not been an hour when I was not grateful—and what mischief I have done I know; and I stay here to make it right. I don't see how I can do it all; I cannot plan it, but I believe that ways will be shown to me. The damage to the farm I am repairing, and for Jonathan I have already paid. Yes, I have already paid that, although his mother was not to hear it yet. I might have been his wife, and I would not, although I love him as well as ever you three loved your husbands when you were as young as I. I let you know it, though I did not let him know it. Now, won't any of you see that I only want to pay my debts? Won't any of you?"

Cassandra would have said something not unkind, but Henrietta got ahead of her:

"How do you expect to pay for firing the barn and wheat?"

"I?" said Bertha. "I burn the barn and wheat?"

"What is the good of acting the hypocrite when your mistress knows it?"

After a moment Bertha placed herself before Susanna, and said: "I want to talk to you alone, immediately. You had better come. If you don't, you will think that you never knew what it means to be sorry."

Both Cassandra and Henrietta were intent, neither say-

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ing a word, for the former was extremely anxious that she should go, the latter that she should not. She did go, eagerly. Although she followed into the long-unused family sitting-room, yet when the door was closed and they were shut in together, it could not have been told from their bearing which one had demanded the interview. There was no more hope of getting rid of Bertha, but she rejoiced to be at close quarters with the girl who seemed to embody all her troubles.

Bertha turned sharply around, and said, "You told them that I started the fire."

"You mistake the beginning," said Susanna, leisurely. "The first thing for you to do is to explain the charge you made against the principles and the common sense of my son Jonathan."

"What charge?"

"That he asked you to be his wife."

"Don't you believe that?"

"Hardly."

"You will believe it when he tells you. In the mean time I shall tell you that I refused him because I knew what a grief it would be to you, and because I would not plant myself where I am not wanted. You said I kept him here when you would have had him in the ministry. Well, now I give him back to you, and that settles that between us. Now I ask you, Why did you say that I am responsible for the fire?"

"Because you are, and for everything else that has gone wrong here. Do you think you can stop me from speaking the truth?"

"On the contrary, I am going to see that you do speak it; and to insure that, I am going to tell a piece of it now

HEARTS CONTENDING

myself. I saw who made that fire, and it was your son Antony."

"Try to lie more credibly."

"Take your own advice. That night I went to my room from Jesse's and sat there in the dark, and I saw what happened between Antony and his father. Much later I heard steps under my window, and there was Antony again. I saw him walk over toward the barn; shortly afterward I saw him go through the nearest wheat-field, throwing lighted matches among the wheat. Then I saw the fire in the barn, and came to tell Mr. Heilig."

"Do you expect me to believe you?"

"Others will. Look at it for yourself: I was with Jesse until late that night; I was the first to tell you about the fire, I helped to put it out; I have done everything possible for all of you since. Who is guilty? I? Or Antony, who was half drunk, who had a quarrel with his father just before, and was found on the far edge of the wheat-land just after? Which will people believe?"

"You will find out. The story that you did it has already started on its way."

"Very well. I told you this privately to give you a chance to conceal it; but if you spread your report, I spread mine."

The excitement began to die down in both of them, as discussion seemed to be impossible; and Bertha, gazing thoughtfully at Susanna, said: "I don't see what your purpose was in saying this. I don't believe that you believe it yourself. Look me in the face and tell me that you think I made that fire!"

"It is not for you to judge what I believe; but why do I say that? Talk as you like, I am going now. Does it make you happy to think that I have lost everything

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through you? One thing only I have saved, and that is the memory of my son Antony."

"You have saved Antony's memory? What do you mean? Wait! Did you accuse me because it is already said that he did it?"

"I know that you are the one."

"Has it been said about him? I see in your face that it has. Wait! Here is my opportunity. I will not tell; I promise you I will not tell. He said I owed him something, and now I can pay both him and you. This is a way to pay—by letting every one think that I did it, and not he—but such an awful way! However, thank God that I have any way! I will say nothing, not a word."

She ran out of the room, her body shrinking like the body of a thin, over-worked animal when it runs; she could not control her weeping, and could not see who Job was when he came toward her in the hall. He looked after her, looked at the door through which she had dashed, and went on toward it.

Susanna heard the step, and could not believe that she recognized it: it was weak but not uncertain; and she would have found the entrance of Antony less incredible than Job with that demeanor. He was erect; his face, marked by spiritual hard living, expressed concentration upon an important purpose; he looked more the head of a clan than ever.

The moment during which they took stock of each other was severe for both.

Job spoke: "Cassandra informs me that Bertha burned the barn and wheat. Do you know anything about that story?"

"I told Henrietta, and she told Cassandra."

HEARTS CONTENDING

“Why did you?”

“Why not?”

“Because it is not the truth.”

“Do you know that?”

Her reply did not deter him at all. “I do know it,” he answered, “and so do you, and so would any one who knew the events of that night, and what the girl has done since. This sounds like the report of a crazy person.”

“It sounds sensible to me,” said Susanna, with indifference. “However, sensible or not, and true or not, it is well on its way through the county by this time, and it will do what I intended it to do when I started it. There will be no more mention of Antony in this connection.”

“Antony? And you started it?”

“Just so. It was going about that your barn and wheat were burned by my son Antony; and although I believe it to be true that she did it, I would declare her or you or myself to be the guilty one, although I knew it to be a devilish lie, rather than that such a thing should be said of him.”

“You know who made that fire, Susanna; and I know, though until now I was glad not to say so; but rather than see this wrong done, I shall publish that Antony did it.”

“I can’t help that,” said she, trembling, but maintaining her indifference. “I have nothing to say to what you do. I have lived in your house as long as I can. I am going, and if Jesse so chooses I shall take him with me.”

“Why do you want to go?”

“Because I no longer know you, and it is not decent that I should live with you,” she answered, with the hard logic of the desolate.

The two who had been companions year in, year out, for thirty years, stood and looked at each other.

THE SECOND INSTALMENT

“So you want to leave me,” said he, slowly.

“Did you think there was no end to what you could do to me? How you have made me suffer while you were busy with—what were you doing? Reckoning up last year’s dandelions?”

“Susanna, will you listen to me?”

His voice appealed, not for justice but for sympathy—the man’s appeal to the woman: it was a tone of thirty years before.

“Don’t stand there. Won’t you sit by me? Over there, then. There is much that I should have known and did not know until now. I want to talk with you, then I shall leave you free.”

Before beginning he was silent for a moment, and he took pains with what he said; and she awaited his statement watchfully, with eyes full of passion thrown back upon itself.

“After what happened to us, I could not live as I had done. That my nearest friends were not anxious to judge me kindly showed how unsuccessful my life had been, and I thought that the fault was in my understanding of things, and that I could discover and correct it, and begin afresh in virtue. I was proud. Being proved wrong when I had done my best to be right, I thought myself fooled and a sport for—Him who looks down upon us. Wrong I would not be. Therefore, I would do nothing until I had satisfied myself that I was grounded rightly, and I would allow those who depended on me to do nothing. This girl’s actions were not my care; and she begged permission to work out a debt she felt to us, and I gave it.”

He allowed her to survey what he laid before her, assuming wifely comprehension on her part; and she noted how

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short a time it took him to dispose of the subject of the girl and put it out of his mind.

"I never imagined that my waiting for the truth—I meant it for that—could make you unhappy, but I see now that I have been indulging myself at your expense. You thought that we had all forsaken you—you even thought that I had. You were miserable. You said what you did about the cause of the fire because it seemed that you had only Antony left."

Now he gave her an opportunity to reply, and she did not; but her face quivered.

"I have learned something," he continued, in a tone of even more intimate confidence. "God gave me enough when he made me so that I must work to be happy, and then gave me work to do. He owes me no explanation; I have no deserts. Work is good. I need to know no more than that. I will go back to work. You bring me back."

With the declaration his voice became stronger. His decisive movement, turning his body entirely toward her, indicated a like turning of himself; it was the movement of a man impassioned and not old.

"Susanna, now I know how unhappy I have made you, and I have tried to explain myself to you; and for what I have brought on you I ask your pardon. Will you grant it? You and I have much between us; since you came to me first, thirty years have gone. I asked you, then, with a great wish to have you; now my wish to keep you is increased by the measure of those thirty years. Will you come to me again?"

She clasped her hands until the interlaced fingers writhed, and said nothing; but her husband saw that it was because she could not. He went to her.

THE SECOND INSTALMENT

Some time later they started out together to go over the farm. Cassandra and Henrietta saw them from a window, and went to the carriage beaming and walking softly, and unconsciously spoke to each other in whispers, lest the two should be disturbed.

XV

ESTHER'S PRIVATE ACCOUNT

"**A**RE you very tired?"

"Not at all—I had a good day—but very hungry."

"The hot water is waiting for you, and supper will be on the table by the time you are ready."

Esther had been knitting when she heard coming up the stairs the steps which marked the divisions of her day, and her needles and her rose-colored ball were still in one hand, her face still upturned from receiving her husband's salutation. The transient attitude lasted because, although they had nothing more to say just then, he did not go into the other room at once; the two pairs of eyes looked satisfied to behold each other, and there was an undertone of content in the voices.

When he did go she set to work, with her characteristic quick, quiet movements. Housekeeping was not hard in the little space she had to cover; it was not a neighborhood of large spaces. The high brick wall on the other side of the street stood only a few feet away; her two rooms comprised the whole second story of the house; and the unsuccessful elderly couple down-stairs could hear almost as well as Saul could the song which she began to sing.

Small as the place was, it did not look crowded, because everything in it was so useful; nor characterless, because a

ESTHER'S PRIVATE ACCOUNT

sentiment pervaded each article of furniture. The sofa, which offered no compromises to the weak, the cupboard, of large size and miscellaneous adaptabilities, and the single strip of rag-carpet on the splintery floor, all suggested that they were rented and the cheerless service in which they had grown shabby. They were too old to acquire a pleasant expression, but the rest of the furniture had it: a bridal quality appeared in the new chairs, which were two, and in the table, which could be made to seat three but would rather not. After much coaxing, Esther had been permitted to buy with her own money the stove, which was not an economical one and embodied her anticipation of the time when they should have a whole house.

She made good use of it now, converting her skill as a cook into an offering to her husband, as she did three times a day. Because he liked to see flowers, she took pleasure in placing on the table a little glass of goldenrod, of which the fluffy gold was already embrowned by the cold nights of late September. Then she awaited him with a happy air. That was the clear sign of the change which had taken place in her since she left the Thal. In appearance she was not much changed: she had neither gained nor lost flesh, her dress was the same, and she was only a little paler from living in town; but she was now mistress of her circumstances, and the content which made an undertone in her voice was the substratum of her formerly harassed personality. The appearance of Saul, who quickly returned, corroborated hers. Away from his rustic surroundings and autocracy of children, he had grown leaner and straighter, and he looked both more flexible and more definite. A stranger would have perceived in connection with this pair a background of dramatic happenings. Their talk, how-

HEARTS CONTENDING

ever, contained no reference to the past or the distant; they were as placidly engrossed with the events of the day as if they had been two merpeople.

Taking their places at the two front windows, when the pleasant meal was over, they made no pretext of occupation with anything but each other. The little room had now assumed its most social aspect: a charm was imparted to it, and even to the outlook, by the change from daylight to dusk; and at the end of the street could be seen a narrow strip of sunset. Evening had not yet begun, nor the evening noises, and the voices of playing children were not discordant.

"I have fifteen caps to take to the store to-morrow," Esther remarked. "They will bring me quite a lot of money. I feel rich."

She opened a drawer in the cupboard and began to hand him caps, every one of which he examined devotedly. They were skilfully knitted of wool of various colors, all bright, and the patterns and the silk tippings were the product of an imagination that made stitches as a Moorish artist made arabesques.

"These are not all the order," she continued. "I have six black ones and three brown to make, which I have been putting off because it is so much pleasanter to use bright colors."

"I don't see how I can let you do this, Esther."

"Don't think of it in that solemn way—that you are letting your wife work for money. Think that I always did love to knit, and when I am knitting it does not seem so long until you come home."

"Very well; if you spend the money for yourself—something unnecessary."

ESTHER'S PRIVATE ACCOUNT

Although she was not even very near him, her reply suggested a persuasive caress. "I have a plan about that money."

"I see it is something that I cannot let you do," he said, smiling, but not agreeing.

"Yes, you can. If I take my pay in trade they will allow me more, and I can buy all our groceries for a long time. I should be so pleased to think I had done that."

"Esther, I simply can't—"

Their opposing wishes, each wanting to make it easy for the other, were energetically urged by both; and she won her point, although he did not exactly yield.

"Don't you need something for yourself now?" he asked, hoping to even up matters.

"I need a hat, but I shall wait to get it until they are marked down."

"How about dresses?"

"I need none now, really."

Against these refusals, which were made with much satisfaction, Saul protested, stipulating for a good hat and insisting on a dress; and the talk went on, broken by comfortable silences. In Esther's hands a rose-colored cap grew larger; Saul's hands were idle, and looked contented. They watched the advance of the evening and the few passers-by. An Italian organ-man was one, and a priest, with his distinctive collar and his cross; both of whom, to the country pair, were strangers from far out in the world. It was a satisfactory time.

A ring at the bell interrupted it; then sounds of some one coming who did not know the stairs, and a knock.

Saul opened the door. At first he did not recognize the woman, who turned out to be Bertha.

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Dressed in black and indistinctly seen, her attitude was almost hovering. To the two this was a subversive presence; coming from a life which they had put behind them, it brought back the past phase. The part, both conscious and unconscious, which the stranger had played in the most intimate concern of her life, came with the stranger to Esther's mind; and the contrast between the help she had then needed to get her to her husband, and her entrenchment with him now, made her suddenly and actively happy. She put an end to the hesitation by embracing Bertha, and exclaiming, "Can it be that you have found us?"

"I wanted very much to see you," Bertha explained, "so I talked to Jesse. You know he is the one to consult about ways and means. He said it was likely that you"—she looked past Esther to Saul—"were here with one of the paper-hangers; so I came to-day, and I got a list, and went from one to another until I heard of you."

They urged her to eat, but she declined; and then asked, diffidently, if they wanted to hear about the Thal, and if they had heard anything.

The manner of all three showed recognition of the fact that here the simplest question might be equivalent to a slur upon the action of Saul and Esther; and in Esther there was also a sudden heaviness of sorrow not otherwise shown.

"We have heard something," said she. "The newspapers told us about the fire and the accident to Jesse, and about Antony; and two or three times we have met people from that part of the county. Tell us how it all was."

Bertha gave a simple account, and they listened, with no outbursts. Esther's tears, which came quietly, were quietly removed. When it was finished, Saul asked:

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"What are the prospects for Jesse?"

"He is certainly recovering, slow as it is. The doctor assures us that he will be entirely well in time."

"And my aunt and uncle?"

"They have resumed charge of everything. Your cousin Jonathan is assisting; and so was I, until to-day."

Bertha's voice trembled slightly.

"It is strange to me about that fire," said Esther, in a low tone of difficult self-control. "How did it start?"

"That has not been found out. At first your father and mother were too deep in sorrow to pay attention to the question; but when they heard that it was being talked about, they said to many people that no one knew, and that it looked like the work of a malicious tramp. This theory satisfied the people, and they soon began to talk about other things."

Divining back of the brief account some sort of difficult explanation, both hearers postponed their questions.

"Then the Thal is returning to itself?" Saul said, as a happy summing up.

"It is. The harvesting is done, work is going on as it should, the barn is progressing well, and the miller who held off so long has come to run the mill until Jesse can go back."

There was a long silence; and after a little more talk, Saul made a slight excuse and went out. His departure momentarily obscured in his wife's mind even the serious news which she had been hearing.

"So this is your new home?" said Bertha.

"Yes; this is my home."

Esther showed both rooms, and called attention to their facilities.

HEARTS CONTENDING

When the two friends had sat down again, she was so impressed with the serious anticipativeness of Bertha's manner that she waited without introducing another subject of conversation, and after a while she put the question:

"Bertha, did you take all this trouble to find us only to see me, or is there a special reason?"

"I have wanted to see you more and more ever since you went; but there is a special reason, too. I am here to ask you to come home."

"Why do you come for that purpose?" asked Esther.

"I am not surprised that you think me presuming. I am presuming; but there is something that you ought to know; and if you would listen, and take my information for what it is worth— I believe you would come if it were put before you."

With the situation which was before her, to listen or not to what might tear her happiness up by the roots, Esther dealt quickly. "What have you to tell me? If I went, I don't believe they would let me in."

"They want you to come home more than anything else in the world; it would do more than anything else can do to restore the Thal. That is what I have to tell you. Both your brothers knew that I was coming."

"How is it, really, with my dear father?"

The story was retold, with a different construction: the events were shown with reference to their effect upon Job, and Bertha put into it the sympathy of her own participation with middle life grief-stricken. "Your father thought that all this had happened because he had been wrong in his ideas of conduct," she concluded. "If you come back, I believe he would take it for a sign of blessing. And there is one who cannot come back."

ESTHER'S PRIVATE ACCOUNT

"You are in mourning, I see. I have a black dress, too, for Antony," said Esther, with sudden, incoherent bitterness, which took the place of a burst of weeping.

Bertha allowed her plenty of time, intent as the waiting was until she spoke again. "You give me excellent reasons for going, and it is a great thing to hear that they would let me in. You don't know how I long to see them."

"Will you come with me to-morrow?"

"It does not depend on me, but on what Saul says."

"Surely you will decide for yourself to go to your own mother and father!"

"I am Esther Gantner now."

Bertha tried a little urging, but made no headway, and subsided into a dazzled silence.

"You don't understand, do you?" Esther said. "You will some time."

"You seem so far away, Esther."

"I am not far away from you, and never shall be, because you helped me on that night. I think you are more changed than I am. When you tried to persuade me not to leave home, it was done with all your heart. Now you are trying again to persuade me; but you do it as if you had made up your mind to it long ago, and would not give up your determination."

"I don't know how to reach you because I do not find you as you were. How can it be that you await permission to go to your own home?"

Esther replied slowly, selecting, and reserving much. "What the child owes the parents is very great, but what the wife owes the husband is more, and my debt to my husband is greater than that of most women. I know it.

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Since I left my father's house I have had plenty of time to think of things."

"Can the marriage ceremony make so much difference?"

"It is not the marriage ceremony; that is only a confirmation. The real thing begins when you have once given all up to your man and he to you, and there are many ways to do that."

"Are you very happy?" asked Bertha, timidly.

"Very happy."

"Has it been worth it?"

"It has been worth everything—though it should end to-night. Don't be distressed, Bertha. If Saul consents, I shall go with you. I want to go. Bertha, what has come to you? Lift your head. I believe that now you understand what love is. No? Not yet?"

Esther's imagination had never been so stirred on behalf of another as it was during the hour which passed before Saul came home; during which Bertha, influenced by the meeting with an ideal as powerful as her own, confided a good deal of her part and of her motives. Seeing that Esther had been wrought upon, though she did not seem unhappy, Saul was glad when the arrangements for the night were made, the stranger gone to the bed procured for her, and Esther free to make disclosures. However, she postponed them, suggesting that they should sit at the windows for a while, and that a light was not needed; and they resumed the places where they had sat in the beginning of the evening, which now seemed long past.

When she did lay before her husband the new facts, he was so slow to speak that she prompted him by asking whether she should go.

ESTHER'S PRIVATE ACCOUNT

"I want you to do what you want to do," he said, in his quietest manner.

"When Bertha came, and still more when you went out, I saw that you did not approve."

"I was afraid that she would make you unhappy. She is the first person you have seen from home, and you have had enough sorrow coming to you."

"You went away so that I could hear everything she had to say, and make my own choice, didn't you, Saul? Well, now I shall make it. We have often said that we would not go back until we could go together, so well off that we could compel their approval; and although I think that you have already done enough to show them that I made a good choice, I know you do not think so, and I am going to wait for you."

"You would have to wait a long while. I have not done much yet, Esther."

"It is a welcome opportunity, dear."

Although he asked an explanation, she would say no more on the subject, and talked in a cheerful way about other things. He made scarcely any answer, and presently put an end to her diversion by stretching out his hand to her, and saying: "Esther, come here to me. Do you want to leave me?"

What she had felt, during the period of her exile and in the evening before they went away together, came back to her, now that their positions were reversed. "To leave you!" she said. "Saul, although five months have passed, I cannot yet believe that you will really come home to me each day. And do I not know what you sacrificed for me?"

"It is like you to think that, when you were the one who

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sacrificed. Are you sure that if you go back and see them all, and the old home, you can be satisfied to return?"

"It will be my pride that I have the right to return. You have not given me one unhappy memory in our lives."

"Then go, dear, by all means. I have been a selfish fellow. Though I did not lose sight of your position, and though I knew that I ought to insist on your going back and making the attempt, at least, to be reconciled to your father, I was too much afraid of losing you. I put it off from day to day, while I worked ahead and was just happy in having you. Have you been wanting to go before to-night?"

"Yes; but not so much as I wanted to stay. Now I can go, since you are willing."

For the first time since the night of their departure they had the feeling of separation averted; and it drew them closer, as did the physical separation which was near. When the details of her going had been settled, they recalled that night and its charms. Bertha's assistance was mentioned, and Saul asked what had caused the change in her.

"I don't know," said Esther, "but I believe that she had never thought of any one as we think of each other. She has a strange idea that she is responsible for the misfortunes in the Thal, and she wants to pay them off. It is a good thing, that uprightness."

"And you think that now she has learned," said he, not noticing the second remark. "Well, we should know by sympathy. We have come to be good judges."

They sat late at the window, because when they moved it would soon be time for Esther to go; and in the morning the gayety over the meal with their first guest was not really

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very gay. As the battered old stage, which smelled of smoke and pipes, and made much more noise than its rate of progress justified, moved off with the girls in it and left Saul standing at the curb, Esther kept her eyes on him as long as she could see him, and her thoughts were altogether retrogressive; but when they had left the town behind, and had been out on the country road for a while, the country home to which she was going began to seem more real. The air and the pleasant, modest prospect of fields and woods excited while they welcomed her: allegiances of the last few months met allegiances as old as herself. Bertha, too, was a source of excitement. Although her talk was all encouraging, Esther missed the whole-hearted interest which had made her such an influential confidante, and felt that she also was passing through some serious experience. Esther found it hard to keep quiet, was glad that there were no other passengers, and set herself to look at the homes along the road, to see what changes there were since she came that way.

When the stage crawled around the Himmelberg and the Thal opened out before her, harvested and shining and surrounded by the mountains in autumn color, she felt the need of more time to bear what was coming. The driver was asked to stop, and she stepped out into the road. She looked at the mountains, the creek, the fields, and at her father's house; and as she looked her old life inundated her, her eyes strained, her lips tightened. The progress of her glance was slow, and she did not notice two men coming through the nearest field until they had climbed the fence and were only a few steps away.

Jonathan, who was the first to see the black-robed girls

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standing in the dust, looked overjoyed, and made a movement toward them; but a gesture from Bertha kept him still. She also stood still, gazing at his thin face and the gray hairs on his temples as if they made a new impression on her. Arrested by his son's halt, Job stopped. To his worn countenance the new signs of determined negation of impulses imparted a quality of youth.

Esther went toward him slowly, saying, "Father," as if that were an urgent appeal.

"How is it that you are here?" he asked; the two spectators listening to every inflection.

"Bertha came to the city and hunted until she found me. She told me I might come."

"Bertha? Again?"

"Father, may I go in? I want to see mother."

"Why did you go away from me as you did, daughter? Did you think you would be better off with him than with me?" Job's tone reproached her with depreciation of what he had lavished.

"It was not what I should get from him, but what I had for him. I had to give that. Now, may we come back?"

"You may."

"Father, I do not ask to come without him. Tell me that you invite my husband, or I must go again. I owe that to him."

Bertha gave a slight start.

Esther continued: "It was altogether my fault that we went as we did. His heart was set on asking nothing of you or me until he had a home to offer me; but I brought it about: to satisfy me he went against you and against his own feelings as a man. Now I owe it to him not to go where he cannot go. Won't you let us both come?"

ESTHER'S PRIVATE ACCOUNT

"I want you, Esther; but the man who took you—"

"No, father; the man I chose."

"I want never—"

"Father," Jonathan interposed, "don't say it."

Job looked around, as if he had received a shock, at the son who was expressing himself for the first time as crown-prince.

"The thing is done, and for my part I never disapproved of it. Esther is happy, you see she is; and she is dutiful in asking you to let her in, and her husband."

Before anything more was said, Bertha walked away. Job's children waited to see whether he would listen to them, but they were not hopeful.

He reflected, looking at the ground.

"I desire you to come back, Esther. My mistakes hitherto have been many. Yes. Esther, will you and Saul come back?"

Her father and her brother took her home, where her mother was. Jonathan went to look for Bertha, and very soon Esther also wanted to see her; but they could not find her.

XVI

THE LARGEST ITEM

THE bundle was heavy, containing changes of garments, daguerreotypes, a candle and a box of matches, and a package of food—all wrapped in an old shawl. With this provision a woman could live for a while, if she had water and a place to sleep; and the house built by Lieb the schoolmaster offered these additional necessities to his daughter, who unlocked the back door weakly, placed her burden on the table, and sank into the nearest chair. Besides the consideration of her funds, which were so small as not to become an adult, choice brought her to this place. It was her intention to put more than one city between herself and the Thal; but first she desired to rest, to sleep, and, emerging from the state in which all companionship but her own was burdensome, to become tranquil and efficient; and she hoped much from the influence of her father's house, and from its solitude. Here would be met, meagrely but directly, what needs remained to her; she was too tired to have many needs. The effort to bring Esther home had been a last flicker.

When she had rested enough to move, she closed and relocked the door and opened the bundle. She would have liked to bathe, eat, and sleep all at once; and she did eat, stooping in her chair and with her lids dropping over her

THE LARGEST ITEM

eyes. Then she lay down, covered herself with the shawl, placed her head on her arm, and was asleep.

The silence was profound; the light, obscured by old green window-shades, was dim. She slept soundly until, some hours later, steps approached through drifts of dry leaves. Then, waking with difficulty, she sat up, and assured herself by a look of anxious recollection that she had locked the door. One window-shade, however, was about six inches above the sill, and the room could be seen if any one peered in. She could not lower the shade, because the steps were rapidly approaching that window; and her heart began to beat hard as she recognized the tread of the person whom she desired to see most and least. So she moved with silent rapidity to a corner, and flattened herself against the wall.

Her hope that he would decide from the uninhabited look of the place that she was not there, did not last long. He knocked at the front door and at the back, and tried both of them. Then there was silence, and she knew that he was studying the premises. Presently she saw through the unshaded space his eyes, searching the room as far as they could; and the decisive manner in which he turned away and repeated his summons ended her other hope: that he would not see her. Although her impulse was to let him knock, she decided that she might as well have it over. She went leisurely to the door, therefore, opened it, and met Jonathan with an excellent air of the *chatelaine*.

“Here you are,” he said, looking down at her accusingly.

“How did you happen to hunt for me? Didn’t your mother find my letter?”

“She had not when I left. She has been taken up with Esther all afternoon. Of course I thought you were here

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when you were nowhere at home. We had better go down at once; night comes so quickly here in the woods."

"I am not going down," said she.

He came in and seated himself, with a very predominant air. She sat opposite him, folded her hands in her lap, and proceeded, before he asked any questions, "I intend to live in my own home for a while."

"By yourself?"

"By myself."

"What will you do afterward?"

"Look for work."

"Where? So you will not tell me?"

His expression—not smiling, but ready to fluctuate into a smile which should begin a perfect understanding between them—was winning; but she thought that he was making light of her, and sat constrained and displeased, and finally said, "I promised to leave the Thal as soon as I had paid, and I did leave at the first possible moment."

"What determined this as the moment?"

"I had paid."

"So now you feel yourself free?"

The question, by bringing her achievement all before her, changed what had been, in her exhaustion, no more active an emotion than a sense of relief from weights, into triumphant rejoicing; she saw her great dream realized.

"Yes," she said. "I put the Thal in order, I kept the mill running, I brought Esther home, I—yes, I think I may feel satisfied."

"And are you as happy as you expected to be?"

"Yes. I am happy." Her manner changed again, and as quickly. "Don't you think that soon it will be almost as it was in the Thal?" she asked, with timid eagerness.

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"I think that it will soon be as nearly restored as it ever can be."

For a moment she said nothing, and he knew that she was contemplating what she had done, and did not disturb her.

"This morning your father hesitated in his answer to Esther, and he acted finally by your advice. What do you infer from that?" she then inquired, having reached an unsatisfactory point in her contemplation.

"It has gone very hard with father. He never distrusted his own will before; and since he has this new idea of adapting his will to what he cannot master, he lives gropingly from day to day. The world is not what he thought it. Your going in this way will be a great blow to him; he thought he had befriended you. Are you really so happy to pay him off, item by item, what he never thought you owed, and then to leave the home he offered you without a word?"

The effect of this was not what he expected. There appeared upon her face a chill and dimmed look of ebbing vitality, and her voice was unsteady as she answered: "I had to leave. I had promised."

For the moment what she was now to live through dismayed her less than what she had lived through. Her dominance in the Thal had been thoroughly satisfying to her; but each of her own successes made her less necessary there, and the resumption of their proper positions by Job and Susanna, which she had eagerly desired, deposed her entirely. She had felt herself superfluous, and more homeless than when she first lost her home; that was what the restoration of the Thal was to her personally; and this was one of the times when she seemed to experience all of it at once.

HEARTS CONTENDING

Although he did not know what had so suddenly weakened her, he was quick to seize the opportunity of her weakness; the inconsecutiveness of her conduct added force to his. "Bertha," he said, "if you were held by a promise to go, you have kept it. You did go; and you are worn out, poor girl! Now let me take you back. You know what I want."

"I can't."

"Why, dear?"

Exhausted and sensitive as her brief rejoicing had left her, she could scarcely speak of what she felt to be her abject dowerlessness. However, he made her speak of it by silently insisting upon an answer.

"I have nothing at all to bring to you. I am not wanted in the Thal. If I did what you ask, it would be considered a calamity for you. The mere sight of me is painful to your mother, and I don't wonder."

"Nothing to bring me? What more in God's world could a man ask than to have you?"

"He might ask for a better woman," she answered, desolately.

"There are none. I know how you must feel after all that has happened; but won't you put the past behind you, and answer me for the future? All that I have for any woman I gave you long ago. Is it nothing to you?"

"Yes."

His next speech startled her.

"I am not what you deserve, and I have no right to ask the question that I am going to ask: Is it Antony?"

She welcomed this shift of subject, for every minute during which she had in her own hands the choice of answers to his proposal was sweet. "Did you think so because of what I did about the fire?" she said.

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He had known nothing about that; and she told him only that she had permitted a report that she started the fire to neutralize the same report about Antony. He was then almost too horrified to question, and she had to make it appear of little importance. "It has all blown over," she said, "and it was a foolish thing altogether, and might have been better managed. I am surprised that you heard nothing of it. I used to wonder why you did not tell me that you did not believe it."

"Every one knew better than to approach me with such a story. Now I want to know why you did this for Antony?"

She had another moment of exultation as she saw how perturbed he was. Here would be a short, intense period in which she would dominate again; but she replied, with a direct, unhurried, and modest glance, "I did it for your mother, on account of Antony."

"You countenanced a report about yourself that I cannot bear to think should have been mentioned with your name! Bertha, there can have been but one reason."

"There was but one reason."

"And it lies in what he said about himself and you in the wheat-field?"

"It does not."

So possessed by his idea that he did not attend to what she said, he walked to the other end of the room and back, while her eyes followed him. "I had not believed it until now," he said. "Bertha"—he leaned over her without touching her, and she felt suddenly afraid of him, for she had not known that he could look like that—"can you say that there was no truth in what he said?"

"None. There never could have been," she replied; and her look up at him was raylike.

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He drew a long breath. "Then you will come back with me, won't you?"

"No."

Now he prepared himself for the final attack with a sort of ardent patience which she recognized and loved as the same quality that had made him deliberate for two years, and then, in one afternoon, refuse another hour for deliberation. The truth-telling with which he began she loved also.

"Bertha, it was foolish pride which caused you to make that promise about repayment, and it is foolish, high-strung pride which deters you now—unless you honestly do not care for me. If you do, you are slighting a duty to your own self. You owe yourself freedom to love. If you don't consider that, give me a thought. I want the happiness that is due me in life and you can give it or withhold it. Won't you give it to me?"

He waited long for her reply, trying to read in her face what it would be, though he could scarcely see her face in the dim light. As she sat there silently, passion fought with passion to dictate the awaited answer: she might accept in a way to make a slave of him; dominating whom, she knew well that she could soon resume her dominance in the Thal; or she might accept simply the simple proffer of love; his arms were ready to open for her, and she could rest after that. What she did do came from a need in her nature that lay deeper yet.

"No! No! If I loved you it would be a misery to me. If I loved you, and returned to the Thal unwanted and on sufferance, I could never be square with myself again, or be alone with myself, or trust myself in any other matter. Pride! I would rather love myself than have you love me! Now, for God's sake, go!"

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Without comment he waited until the length of the pause showed that her vehemence was at an end. Then he said, ceremoniously: "Will you not be afraid? Have you anything to eat? May I bring you anything?"

"No, thank you. I have food. I shall not be afraid," she faltered, trembling, and straining her eyes to see him.

"Will you come to say good-bye to my parents before you go away from here?"

"It is not necessary. My going is what they need."

"Shall I send you the things you left in the Thal?"

"No, thank you. All I want to keep is here." Her denuded isolation could not have been made plainer.

"Good-night, then."

"Good-bye," she answered, rising.

Both stood still for a minute: the last, as she knew; she knew that he would never ask her again. Her eyes were still strained toward him; then, as long as his steps could be heard her attitude changed only to become more and more that of a listener.

Immediately afterward, with no interval of attention to her feelings, she went hurrying about the investigation of the premises which should be made before the night began. There were only two little rooms in the house, and the one in which she was could be covered by a glance. The glass-doored cupboard with the dishes, the stove which looked as if it could never again be warm, and the lounge which had formerly been her bed, were all lifelessly visible in the greenish twilight. There, too, was the chair in which her father had been sitting at the last. Many memories awaited her when she could give her heart to them. The other room, which had been the sitting-room with a cot in it for her father, had shutters, which were

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closed; so she struck a match and distinguished beyond the wavering sphere of yellow light the cot and the chest of drawers and the little shelf of books. Here she decided to sleep, the shutters making it safer than the back room; and she opened the door so that fresh air might displace the musty air, and in great haste got out blankets and pillows from the lowest drawer in the chest. They also were damp and musty; everything that she touched felt disused.

It was a comfort to go outside, for the sky was a sort of companion. A good, wide sweep of it, already showing several stars, could be seen at the back of the house, where there had been a garden and a little pasture. In front the trees extended branches over the roof. The clearing was so surrounded by woods that every view from it was a short forest-vista, and the air was full of sylvan odors, stronger now than usual, because it was autumn. The path to the road and the path to the spring were nearly obliterated by weeds and leaves, and the spring was choked with them; weeds had also grown between the door-stone and the front door. From the warped and weathered door to the space in the rear, covered with rotting chip-dirt, where the remains of the wood-pile stood, the place had the same forlornness as an old log or a dead tree; its desolation was that of the forest, and not human.

Bertha looked at it all, and made her preparations for the night, which were only to bring a pitcher of water and lock the doors. Then she took what she needed into the front room; barricaded the inner door, which had no lock, with a table and chair; and placed over her candle an old basket to dim the light, so that no ray through a crevice should interest a passing tramp. Although all sorts of people went up and down the mountain road both by day and

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night, her tiny path was hardly ever noticed, and she did not feel particularly afraid of anything that might come over it. She did not care whether she were safe or not as she sat beside the table, and ate her supper of bread and cheese, and looked about her more carefully than she had yet done. Here the past was near; she had time now to remember and to feel; if the cot, the chairs, and the books had only possessed memories, she thought, she would not have had to cherish her recollections alone. Her weeping began quietly, but soon became a wild outbreak, in which she sobbed names to herself, and that they were all blessed, and did not forget her, and would come back to help her if they could. The thought that happy Esther on her wedding journey had been in this very place made her feel more lonely. She made a last tour of her fortifications, laid herself on the bed, pressed her cheek into the pillow, and tried to stop sobbing, but could not.

Now that it was dark she found difficulty at first in realizing that she was not in the Thal nor in the little room in the city, but back in her father's house. The darkness was so intense that, full as her mind and heart were, it obtruded itself; it seemed heavy: hearing had replaced sight as the defensive sense, and crackings in the wall, rustlings, and the noise of the wind were all significant. The wide-sounding wind made her think of the little cleared space outside her thin shelter, where the stars could be seen, and of the black, thick woods covering the slanting mountain for miles and miles. Who might be going over the road that night, she wondered—peddlers or farmers, or others less innocuous? There began a sound of gnawing under the floor. Fragmentary old stories recurred to her, localized on that mountain, some far away, some on the

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near-by road; and other stories, of things seen or heard or felt in dark, lonely places.

She bravely spoke to herself aloud: "That gnawing keeps me awake. To-morrow I shall get a cat. I must have something alive here."

It was the monotonous gnawing, indicating the presence of something alive, which finally sent her to sleep; and when she awoke the cracks in the shutters showed the morning.

The opening of the door seemed to let in the vast, fresh woods themselves, they were so near; and she learned that the weather was gray, and that there was a good deal of wind among the branches, and that the crows were calling, instead of any news of human neighbors. At the beginning of the day it was pleasant to be alone in that high solitude, free of all connection with the world. Time also lay before her, free as space; she could be a pioneer with both, and do what she liked with them. She ate her solitary and stale breakfast in the open air, and soon afterward she was on her way to lay in supplies at a store quite far off on the other side of the mountain.

It was an all-day journey; and as the hours passed, and she continued to walk between innumerable trees, and to watch through breaks in the foliage the distant mountains rise and sink as she was farther up or down on her own mountain, the world seemed to her bigger and more sharply colored than ever before. Those smooth, uninterrupted hours, and the presence of wild creatures which would make no demands on her, were soothing. By evening she was at home again, with a basket on each arm, of which one was full of provisions; the other contained sewing materials and the desired companion. The big gray-and-white cat had

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been donated by the storekeeper, and so mollified by attentions that he was asleep when she opened the basket; and when he found himself in a new place, he examined it with benignity which deepened at certain points in the woodwork to professional interest. That night she went to sleep more readily because of his presence. Once she woke, and saw his eyes and heard his velvety leapings, and his purr, which was a death-preceding roar to the other auditor.

In a day or two, with her two little rooms thoroughly cleaned, she began the sewing and the resting which were her immediate purpose. She had decided where to go and how to look for work, but there was nothing to hurry her except the need of money, and beside her tiny expenditures even her small total was large; so she could take plenty of time to make the clothes needed for her enterprise. A great deal of sewing and of sleeping could be gotten into the long days and the long nights. Every morning, when the house-work was done, she sewed; in the afternoon she was again bending over her stitching, the nape of her neck showing white as an almond-kernel under her coil of hair. She also reread most of the books on the shelf, and spent hours walking in the woods or sitting at her door; and the time that she passed in these ways was always gone before she knew it.

She had companions. The cat was of great importance to her, especially during the first few days, when her loneliness was parching; and the squirrels and chipmunks and rabbits soon began to show themselves. The crows were always about, so bold that she sometimes walked into a group of them, and they would sail up before her, talking very loud and making black notches in the background of

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foliage with their spread wings. She watched the alterations of the weather and of the light, and studied the weather-signs until dark and bright colors in the sky assumed the new importance of a code. The silent continuity of these changes which went on all around her was pacifying as a trusted voice. There seemed no need of stress upon any mortal concern when summer changed to winter without disruption. There were also times when she perceived other companionships: at some hours the dead, whose memories were so near, were by her, she was sure; she felt the thoughts of Jonathan around her often.

She used her voice so seldom that it became strange to her to speak when she made her journey to the store. On other days she met no one; her path was unnoticed by travellers, and she was so anxious that it should not be noticed that she avoided it, and reached the road by going through the woods. When she went in that direction it was always to the same destination. Some distance beyond the road a high rock projected from the mountain side, and from its top there was an excellent view of the Thal. There she would sit, concealed by the bushes which grew upon it; and an autumn afternoon would pass while she looked down, taking deep into her memory the silver line of the creek, the fields and roads, and the home-like aspect of Job's house.

One moonlight night, when she was in bed and falling asleep, she heard for the first time some one coming toward her cabin. Uncertain steps scuffed through the leaves, which were a protection by the warning noise they made, and a knocking was begun on the door that opened into the room in which she lay. Knowing that the door would be easy to break, she stood up in the dark and was ready.

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The man began to demand to be let in, and she found out by listening that he was a drunken tramp benighted on the mountain. She half pitied him. It was some time before the idea occurred to him that the house might be empty, and he talked to himself about it, and tried the door, and walked around to the rear; after which he stood for a while, growling and sniffing, and finally laid himself down in a drift of leaves with his head against the house wall. The boards were thin, and his breathing was audible to her in the night. She stayed where she was until after that time in the morning when she heard him get up and go back to the road.

During the next few days she thought a good deal about him, and with sympathy, comparing his vagabond condition with what hers would soon be, or even with what it was now, in her frail forest refuge. She was thinking about him one afternoon as she sat by a window that opened on the woods and repaired the gown which she had worn when she brought Esther back. If she looked out she saw old leaves torn off and whirled about by the wind; the black gown lying over her lap, at which she continually looked, had been new when the first break occurred in her family, and had gone with her since, acquiring a quality of participation peculiar to stuffs. This was one of the times when those who had left her seemed near; and the thought of them connected itself with thoughts of the tramp, so that she wondered what her father and mother would think of her entering upon a life as rootless and casual as his. Hitherto she had been sure of their approval, but she was not so now; and, irrelevantly, the pedantry which had often characterized her conversations with Jonathan occurred to her and then became clear.

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There was no reassurance to be got by watching the trees and the flitting leaves.

For some time after that she did less sewing than she had done, and more thinking; and one night she became so absorbed in her thoughts that she remained until very late, seated this time at a window that faced the clearing, where she could see the moon. In the deserted space before her the signs of dilapidation and decay received dignity from the moonlight, and the leaflessness and grayness of the almost denuded forest appeared an achieved beauty. That light made of the world beyond the windows a new place, too grave and beautiful for individual insistences and refusals. Bertha, the rays blanching her face and glittering against her eyes, experienced the pains of a planet-begotten tide of emotion.

Before she could rise and prepare for bed she had to shake off a lethargy; and her senses were still dull when, as she combed her hair, her eye was caught by a strange shining in the soft veil which reached to her knees. Starting, she separated the one hair from the others, looked at it and looked again, brought it close to the candle to look. There was no mistaking that it was silver-white. At first her heart sank; it had not before been brought home to her that her physical perfection would have the common end; then she welcomed the proof that she would not last forever, and that, in a short time, as the trees would count it, her wandering would be over. Soon, therefore, she would care no more for Jonathan; but it seemed scarcely sensible to refuse to be happy for such a little while.

Sleep was slow in coming, and brought, instead of rest, a dream. In it she was Jonathan's wife, and had been unfaithful to him. She was conscious of no compensations

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to herself, and the expression of his face as he contemplated her was not more miserable than she herself was. Remorse and shame blasted her, because what she owed him was now not his, and could not be recovered.

When she had succeeded in waking, the impression that she had defaulted remained and was like lead upon her. Esther had implanted in her mind the idea of a due to her man, but she had successfully neglected it hitherto; now she could escape it no more. She had omitted, in her boastfully paid account, an item which nullified the payment as a whole. She saw that.

Now she could not love herself, and she must love Jonathan. What she had kept within bounds obliterated them after that vision of the wronged mate; her heart and her flesh cried out for him.

“Oh, does this mean that I must go down to the Thal and offer myself to him?” she said to herself, in agony.

It was not possible to bear that degree of emotion for many hours. She had to clear herself in her own eyes, she had to know herself to be acting with justice and common sense. Contact with the sane, happy world was necessary, she felt, before she could be sure what were justice and common sense in this case. She had been there too long alone. She did not wait for day: the dawn was no more than a pallor in the east when she was afoot toward her rock, from which she could at least look out.

Not all the stars were gone; the Himmelberg was velvet-black, there was not a light in the Thal, and beyond it the open country faded into gray. She seated herself on a patch of frosted moss on the top of the rock, and sat there while the wind flapped in the bushes. The birds were beginning to wake.

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She endeavored not to feel or think, but to see where lay justice to Jonathan and to the demands of life. That did not take her long. There remained the fight between the clamping will backed by the spoken word, and the ardor, power, and reasonableness that made her soul. That was a mortal struggle.

XVII

MORNING

ALTHOUGH the western sky was still a nocturnal gray, the east was luminous and decked with rosy clouds. The air was beginning to lose the heavy quality of night. First the mass and then the color of objects in the Thal became visible; and it was again possible to see yellow where husked corn lay in the corn-fields, blue in the tightly closed gentians among the frosted grass, and red in the unattainable last apple withering in the tree-top. Lights were burning in the tenant farm-houses, and many lights in Job's house, toward which a lantern moved among the fruit-trees; a light also appeared in the mill-room. Soon after, the deep quiet which the sound of the creek had intensified was pervaded by the noise of the mill.

Bertha, hastening down the road from the mountain, had been eager for the darkness to lift and show her how the Thal had prospered; upon that eagerness she fixed her mind, so that she might not think of what she was about to do. She looked to see if the race were full, and was glad when she heard the mill, because it was a good sign; as was also the comfortable appearance of the house, and the moving lantern which had illuminated the feeding of the new horses in the big new barn. Beyond the buildings ex-

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tended the fields which had been fire-swept, and were now well fenced and ready to flourish in the spring. The Thal was restored; she, descending from her retreat, looked as if she had taken upon herself its ravaged state. Her hair was without life; there were gray hollows under her eyes; her face was thin to sharpness, and extremely pale.

She wanted to find Jonathan without being seen by any one else, for it seemed as if the interpolation of a commonplace meeting would cause her grasp to slip quite off the purpose which grew more difficult as she came nearer to the life and opinions of other people; so she decided to go up on the eastern ridge, from which she could watch who went in and out of the house, and go to him when he came out alone. Leaving the mountain road, she went across the fields and took the path along the tree-covered top of the ridge, with the still dusky Thal on her right hand, and on her left the open country and the deepening color of the sunrise. Before long she saw Jonathan. Apparently he intended to spend the morning in tree-cutting, as he had an axe in his hand; and he took the path ahead of her, and walked south without having seen her. She went on behind him, setting her feet simultaneously with his, so that he did not hear her steps, and following like a shadow.

After a few minutes he felt her eyes upon him, and turned. As he did so she shrank back, away from the man before whom her purpose must be carried out, and he saw her so, among the gray-brown tree-trunks. He stared, not believing that he really saw her; his first feeling, too quick to be a thought, was that here was another ordeal; then he walked back to her with eagerness, checked himself in the utterance of her now unpermitted name, and awaited

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her pleasure, while she gazed at him as if she were trying to see whether he would be good to her.

"Have you been ill?" she asked, when she had seen his face.

"I? No. I thought you were gone from this part of the country. The letter you left for mother made us all think so. Have you been on the mountain all this time?"

She nodded.

"Come into the house, where you will be warm, and have something to eat."

After refusing, she said nothing further; and he began to give the information for which he thought she might have come: "Father and mother are well. Esther was here for several weeks, and when she went back to town father went with her, and to-night she and Saul are coming home to stay. Saul has been persuaded to it. They will live here, and he will learn to run the mill. Jesse is going West next week. To-morrow will be his last Sunday at home, and the whole family is coming to take leave of him and to welcome Saul and Esther. Great preparations are under way in the house."

"Then you stay here as head man—where you wanted to be?" she asked, not commenting on the news of the others.

At the question coming from her, who had made his hardly acquired position valueless to him, a smiling light appeared between his black lashes. "Yes, I stay," he answered. "Do come into the house. They will be so glad to see you, and I can't have you out in the cold."

"I don't want to go in; I want to ask you something. Does it matter to you now that I answered you as I did?"

At first he could not believe that he understood her; then

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he said: "Don't let it hurt you. If I hoped that my life could be passed in a certain way, and it cannot—well, I incurred that."

"Then you don't care."

"Don't I? After seeing what I want, and failing to get it, do you think that I can be satisfied to live with a commonplace woman? What did you come for?"

She tried to take advantage of the opportunity to say what she had to say, but she could not do it yet.

"I don't know whether it was worse to wonder how you were getting on in your hunt for work among strangers, or to see that you are getting on miserably. Don't look like that! I am not going to torment you with urging. What did you come for?"

"I came to finish paying," she murmured.

It seemed impossible to say more; her eyes sank miserably before his, and she turned her head and looked across to the mountains in the east, many miles away. Their irregular line was intensely blue beneath the bright sky, and the sun was beginning to appear; but the space and the increasing splendor could not detain her while she felt him waiting for her to say more. He had always been able to make her speak without speaking himself. Since without a word he compelled her to turn back toward him, and it was plain that he would not spare her from saying all that there was to say, it seemed better to shut out the doubt-producing world by looking straight into his eyes, and so to let her spirit speak undeterred to his.

"You said I was overproud and foolish. You said I owed both you and myself. I came to offer you what you asked."

It was said; and what more was to be done must be

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done by him. With a sinking feeling of relief she waited minutes for him to proceed, and finally looked up at him with a sort of exhausted surprise. As she did so she heard his breath catch in his throat.

“What led you to do this?” he asked.

Intending to answer, she slowly recalled what had led her to do it; and she could not tell him the truth—“A tramp at my door; a gray hair on my head; a dream”—because he would be unable to believe that her resolve, founded on such a basis, was firm, however well she knew that it was.

“I know that you have a need to approve of yourself that is as strong as the need to eat,” he said. “Did you come down here to say this to me so that you could be sure your duty was done, relying on my having ceased to want you? If so, you made a great miscalculation. How do you think these months have been for me, with the thought in my head that some other man will get you?”

She faltered, “I did not ask myself what you would say; I did not dare.”

“I don’t imagine that it was easy for you. I don’t see what brought you to it. You told me that if you agreed to what I proposed, you could never be alone with yourself. Then you were alone with yourself; and, perhaps, you began to think that you could not stand that either, unless you settled with me. Is that it?”

“Yes.”

“So you came down to get it over?”

Now that he saw it all, she knew that his answer would come next, and began to tremble. “I thought you would understand,” she said. “You have always wanted other people to do what they thought was right.”

HEARTS CONTENDING

He laughed slightly, by way of easing the tension which he was unable to endure while complying with his own demands upon himself. "Well, now I am going to do what I think is right. It seems to be a luxury, and I am going to indulge in it," he said. "You may feel yourself square with the world. I make no claims on you at all."

It was she who compelled him by a look to proceed; he did so. "You are the only thing that I want; but do you think I would take you if you gave yourself to me in payment? I would not touch you."

She gazed at the leaf-strewn ground, and tried to see as a whole the irreparable situation in which she was. She felt as if a cold flood were sweeping over her when she thought of that. It was not so when she thought of him, for she saw that he was free of her; she could never master him.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked.

He averted his eyes to the horizon, where half the sun's disk showed above the mountains; then looked again at her, for whom he was even willing to go through the recapitulation of his lost hopes. "What I did want was the kind of work I like, and a home to keep, and you in it. But I wanted you to want to be there. I wouldn't give you less than my best, you see; and if I knew that you didn't care for that, I don't know how long I could keep on giving it, even if you were with me."

The sun rose higher, fast and red; the clouds were fiery; the great sweep of country to the east looked very wide and cold. She had horrible feelings of exile and of loss.

"I wanted to do right," she said, aloud, but to herself.

"You wanted to owe nobody, didn't you?" he answered, with sympathy. "But you can't be square; no one is ever

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square. You cannot fix a relation with any human being, it must be elastic; you take and you give continually. Do not even the dead make claims upon us? And we honor them."

Staring at the sun, she saw what was necessary to make her free to accept what life offered her, which would be not less than all her dreams, but more: it promised to pass even her power to enjoy, it was so complex and so rich.

She walked over to him.

"Jonathan," she said, clearly, "I have been quite wrong, and I love you. I want to be with you. Will you let me belong to you?"

He looked at her a moment, then put his arms around her, and kissed her lips and eyes. "Will I let you?" he murmured. "Good God!" He continued to look down at her white face; her eyes remained closed.

XVIII

MORTAL POWERS

HIS mother had often put a stop to Jesse's whittling in the kitchen, and on Sunday she would not see him whittle anywhere, but now she sat and watched him, and expressed no objection. Knowing that this concession was made because he was going away so soon, he had met it by spreading papers on one end of the wood-chest, and taking care that every chip and splinter should fall on them. The initials and date which he had carved when he was a little boy were on the uncovered end of the chest, where he could see them. Between that early effort of deliberate art and the fan, with lace-like carving of almost Oriental elaborateness, to which he was putting last touches, there were many years. He looked from one to the other, and thought of that; remembered how elated he had been on the Sunday when he was left at home alone for the first time; and reflected that he had not again felt so free until now.

This was an important morning: much was to happen when the family came back from church; and the room was at its very best in a state of expectant preparation. Whichever way his eye turned, it met shining surfaces, of furniture and window-glass, and the leaves of the blooming begonias on the sills had been attentively washed; the clock

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also showed cherishing once more. Behind the panes in the dresser the shelves were almost empty except for the Heilig mug, as the best gold-banded china was all in place on the table. The stove was covered with kettles from which came bubbling sounds. The difficult occasion, thought Jesse, would have all possible material helps.

His glance from one to another sign of prosperity encountered an anti-climax when it rested on his mother, and he knew that he would see a second if he could see his own face. She was neither sallow nor thin; but her expression of cheerful absolutism was gone, and she looked like a woman who would never again have the energy to harmonize with her surroundings. Now her large gold ear-hoops were incongruous with her face. As for himself, he knew the details of sick hair, hollow features, and stooping shoulders well enough, having avoided them in his mirror for many a morning.

He was very anxious to find out before he went away how she really felt about all that had happened, so that he might know whether to think of her as less or more sorrowful; but he was afraid of distressing if he questioned her. Nothing at all was said between them until he opened the completed fan and placed it in an ornamental position on the mantel-shelf. Then she made a pleased comment, and a little later remarked:

"I think there will be rain soon. I am afraid it will spoil Henny's dress. She has a handsome blue silk this fall, but the color looks to me as if water would spot it."

The fact that she was sufficiently at peace to think of that encouraged him to say, "Will you be glad, mother, to have them all here once more?"

"It is long since they were here," she answered, seeming

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pleased to talk. "I shall be glad to have the family as it was; so will your father. Esther and Saul here, too, to stay! If only you would not go West!"

He did not realize how much his going mattered to her; it did not seem to him important enough to speak of among the capital events. "Then you are satisfied?" he said.

"Yes, I am satisfied. The main thing is that your father shall be contented, and happy if possible; and next to that, to go from day to day peacefully." The lassitude of her pose increased. "It is far better with us now than we could have hoped to have it. However, no situation is hopeless so long as there remains something that we can do. Even about Antony it is not quite hopeless. You and I, Jesse, think of him as others do not; and he needs us to think of him."

Without returning any answer, Jesse made his way, with his stiff, semi-invalid walk, to the door, and stood looking out. The air was soft and pleasant to his face, and so still that not a half-dead leaf was hurried from its bough. Now and then the sun appeared in the form of a misty yellow patch, burnishing the edges of the surrounding gray, which was thickest in the east, where the rain was gathering. The creek was already full, and made more noise than usual. Jesse listened and looked.

Before long a new phaeton drawn by a fine gray horse approached at a racing gait and stopped; then Henrietta came up the walk with her blue skirts waving; and as he smiled down at her and drew aside to let her in, she detained him with her hand on his shoulder, saying: "My dear boy! Susanna, this is a great day. Esther and Saul at home again, and Jesse come back to life!"

"It is even more of a day than you think," said Susanna;

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and Jesse was sure that she was anxious to get the announcement over. "I have a new daughter. Bertha came back yesterday; you must have seen her at church; and this week she and Jonathan will be married."

He was also sure that the necessary narration was irksome to her, so he took it upon himself.

"Yesterday morning very early, as I was coming back from the barn, where I had left father," he said, "I saw Jonathan taking mother in that direction; and there was an air of serious business about them both. I wondered what had happened, and when I came into the house I learned immediately, for any one might have known Jonathan's wishes about Bertha; and there she was, sitting in the kitchen, white as flour, and Esther offering everything she could think of for people who feel faint, but nothing that Bertha would accept. I was not wanted there, so I went out to the barn again, where I found a serious council. Jonathan was in such a hurry to say what he had to say that he had escorted mother from the house to father in the cow-stable, and he was explaining himself while two rows of cows looked and listened. It was the most interesting thing they had seen since the fire."

Henrietta demanded by a look a more serious account from her sister, and Susanna said: "The girl had been all this time at her father's little house on the mountain; and yesterday morning she came down, and Jonathan met her and settled it with her, having had it in his mind for many months. It went with a rush at the end, just as it did when he left the ministry."

"He was going to marry her; there were no two ways about that," Jesse went on. "Unmarried to him she could not stay here, and he would not let her go away by herself,

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and back to the mountain she should not go at all. Therefore, father and mother must consent at once, or he would be off with her. He put it gently, but that was the gist of his statement. That he had nothing to keep her on did not seem to worry him. I must say, however, that he was most earnest in asking their consent; and then he left them to talk it over, and I came back to the house with him."

"Had you nothing to say, one way or the other?" inquired Henrietta, appreciating what influence the newly recovered son would have just before he went away.

"Some little; I advocated consent. There are not so many Heiligs as there were," said Jesse. "Well, I came back with him, and he and Esther took care of Bertha. It was certainly very hard on her, that waiting. What Esther's recommendation would be, if she were asked for it, was easy to see; and as to him—I don't know how her interest in him will hold out through life: there will never be anything uncertain about his feelings. A good half-hour passed before father and mother came in, but when they did appear he nodded to Jonathan, and went to Bertha and made her welcome."

The look which Henrietta now directed to Susanna was so full of angry sympathy that she was quick to answer: "No, I did not oppose it long. Although Job was in favor of it, and has always thought well of her, he told me that he would not consent unless I did. At the same time he urged that it would be so much better if I did consent; and I saw that if Jonathan left us, it would be my doing; so—"

"Then you can receive her as a daughter?"

"Oh yes! I can learn to do that. Job has offered them the north farm for their home."

Henrietta wanted to say something cheerful, but could

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find nothing in the situation upon which cheerful comment seemed possible. The best she could do was: "Jonathan on the north farm, and Saul and Esther with you here. There remains the south farm when this boy comes back with a Western wife."

Jesse received this smilingly, not expending a word.

"Go with me into the parlor," she said to him. "I should like a little good-bye talk with you—if you think you can talk to me this time without fainting," she added, to him alone. In the parlor, however, her persistent blitheness vanished; her eyes filled with tears, and she said, "Oh, Jesse!"

"Don't take it so to heart, Aunt Henny. By accepting it mother does the best for every one, herself included."

"I know; but—her son to marry the girl who set the barn and wheat on fire!"

"Bertha never did that."

"Your mother thought she did."

"She does not think so now; I have heard her say so; and it would be a kindness if you would let no one say that Bertha did it."

"That is indeed the only thing to do, as matters have turned out. But your mother! It goes to my heart to look at your mother, Jesse."

"I know. Now there is something timid about her and about father. I believe Aunt Cassandra is here."

Elias and Cassandra came in. The kindly man was happy without reservation to be there once more; but she looked and moved anxiously. As her eye caught Henrietta's each one knew that they were both thinking of the last time they had met Bertha in that room. Seeing that they

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wanted to speak to each other, Jesse engaged his uncle in conversation, but he heard the purposeful whispers.

“Susanna has been telling us about it. What will you do, Henny?”

“Treat her cordially, like any other girl coming into the family.”

“Right. That is what we ought to do.”

Heman, who had been talking to Susanna, joined them, and they seated themselves, and Jesse placed himself in a corner where he would see everything that happened. There was some discussion about why the others were so late, but it interested no one; they were all listening. When voices and steps were heard in the hall, and Job, Philip, Saul, and Esther entered, the others rose, and it seemed to Jesse that he was watching the family relations readjust themselves visibly. Both Elias and Heman went toward Job as quickly as he toward them; and he shook hands also with Philip, although they had come together. Then he stepped back in a way which presented Esther and Saul to the older people, and the Heilig men shook hands with their sister’s son while the women saluted Esther. It was very quiet; few words were said.

Jesse watched the formation of groups and the beginning of conversations without entering any, keeping himself free to get the full value of all betrayals of feeling or opinion that might be made. The fact that Heman thought more of Saul since he had asserted himself became clear to him first; then, as he contemplated the scene of amity, he thought that the stranger would find the Heiligs presenting to him a harmonious front. As he was wondering how far it would be really friendly, the lowest of the voices attracted his attention.

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It was the voice of Philip, who was standing very near him and speaking to Job:

“There is something which I ought to say to you.”

Job waited attentively. Jesse was not more interested in hearing his uncle than in seeing how docile his father would be.

“You remember in what circumstances they went away from here the last time,” said Philip, excluding himself from the insulted party. “Do you think you ought to take back what you said?”

“I thought of that,” said Job, without a frown, “but they know that I am earnestly glad to have them again. They know that,” he repeated, “and the breach will close more quickly if it is ignored. If you think they are entitled to an apology, however—”

“You made, on that occasion, a statement of your religious position; and you are an elder,” Philip continued. “Don’t you think you should say something different now?”

“That I thought of, too,” Job answered, steadily, “and I have decided against it. Although I believe that I shall never clearly know how to live, I have taken my life upon myself again; and that they see, and I have nothing to tell them. Perhaps no one of us knows how to live; perhaps our minds will not hold it. This is not satisfactory to you as minister. If you say so, I will no longer be an elder.”

“By no means. You do right in this if you satisfy yourself, and we cannot afford to lose you.”

Jesse thought this over until he was recalled to his surroundings by the signs of unrest about him: the guests were expecting the arrival of Jonathan and Bertha, and conversation went on by spurts, and eyes sought the door. He commended Jonathan for keeping her away for a while,

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although he too was impatient for the same thing, which was the climax of the day to him. What he wanted was to see how she would behave, as he perceived that the future history of the Thal depended on that point. For herself he felt repulsion, for he could not get out of his mind how straight she had walked, through spiritual compromises and material calamities, to the attainment of her desire; and when he thought of her exulting, as it was only human that to-day she should exult, he would have been glad never to see her face again.

They were heard; from the tone of Jonathan's voice in the hall Jesse knew that he was reassuring her. Then the door opened, and although he was behind her she faced the family for a second alone. To Jesse she looked smaller than usual, and she was very pale.

Job went to her immediately, and presented her as his new daughter. Jesse saw that Jonathan was on the watch for slights which he would remember and resent, but there were none to be seen; all the greetings were kind, and it was barely perceptible in Henrietta that she was discharging a duty, while Bertha's reply to her was a little easier than to the others. During the whole ceremony she did not look at Jonathan once, but she kept referring to Job with her eyes, as if she were trying to see whether her behavior satisfied him. Jesse asked himself by what new standards she was gauging: he saw that they were new; but he could not tell whether virtue had gone out of her or come in.

With present friendliness facilitated by her temperate conduct in the past, Cassandra immediately took Bertha under her wing, and Philip exerted himself to make the difficult occasion easier. Jesse saw and assisted; and be-

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tween them the dinner ended with each of the company feeling a little nearer to the others than before. It was Philip's diplomacy which brought all the older people into the parlor afterward, and left the kitchen and the work to Esther and Bertha with their helpers.

Having taken himself off for an hour or two, Jesse had, on reappearing, an opportunity to see how it would be at home when he was gone. The voices in the kitchen were silent when his hand sounded on the latch; and he found the four seated in a close group, and could easily imagine the mutual interest of the pair who had lately taken the great step and the pair who were about to take it. In the parlor he found the men gathered around the stove and the women around the table, and here also the talk was close-knit. They all made room for him, but they had to make room for him, for he was not an integral part of anything, and he was glad when the younger people came into the parlor, so that he was no longer so conspicuously the odd one. He continued to look for indications of future good or ill will, and saw them: Cassandra and Henrietta seemed to have much more in common than usual; Job made an appointment with Heman for a day after Jesse's departure to inspect some noteworthy stock; and Jonathan and Saul had a long talk with Philip, standing up close together, with the points of resemblance showing clearly in their faces. A manifestation of cordiality between his mother and Bertha was what he wanted; but their manner to each other was plainly painstaking, and he said to himself that they would never enjoy being alone together.

As the afternoon wore on, however, the conversation of the women turned on signs and dreams. Henrietta, who had been saying little, and that little in a soft, thought-

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ful voice, now began to speak in her usual alert manner.

“If you begin to believe, you don’t know where to stop. We cannot say ‘This dream was sent to me, it was proved by what happened, but that one was only a dream.’ If one dream means something, they all do; so I believe none.”

“Henny was always courageous in her ideas, and thought for herself,” Susanna said to Cassandra, “but I stick to the old beliefs because I cannot be sure that I can think better than my mother did; and if she dreamed of muddy water, she always expected trouble, and it nearly always came.”

“I remember well how worried she would be in the morning until she had found out what trouble was foretold,” said Henrietta, “and I think that if it had not been for the dream she would many times not have recognized it for trouble at all.”

“To me there is something solemn about all dreams,” answered Cassandra. “They come to us, we cannot tell from where; and I sometimes think that each one is a foreshadowing of what is to be, if we could recognize it.”

“What I am most afraid of is parsley planted in the house.” Susanna continued with the concrete. “I have seen four cases where the women thought they would raise a little parsley in a box in the kitchen window, to have it handy for flavoring, and every time a child died.”

“Many a child has died when there was no parsley in the kitchen window,” Henny said; and Cassandra was about to reply, but Bertha spoke up.

“My mother would never have parsley growing in her house on account of us children.”

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Cassandra and Henrietta would have looked at each other if they had not been unwilling to be seen doing it; they did not know whether or not Bertha intended to take sides, and they were anxious that she should say more.

"My mother also believed in signs; she had reason to do so. There was a sign in her family which had not failed for four generations, and they did not know how much further back it went. It was always known in that family when one of them was to die, for within twenty-four hours of the death-hour there would float in through a window of the house a little white cloud. Even if they died far away from home this happened. My mother's brother died out West, and his wife wrote to us that she saw the cloud."

Henrietta did not criticise and Cassandra did not confirm, for both wished that nothing should be said until Susanna should have time to appreciate this point of agreement with Bertha. The pause prolonged itself, while she sat with bent head; her own sign of the singing angels was in her thoughts. When she did look up she turned her eyes and met Bertha's, and Jesse and the watching women saw a hopeful look pass. He built a hope upon it.

By him the afternoon had been spent in making the most of such small things, with scarcely less detachment than if he were already away from them all. It was now almost over, and he knew that the time was near when he must quit his easy spectator's position and be the centre of the good-byes. He was tempted to leave the house until every one had gone, but he did not; and although it occurred to him, while he was wishing that the next few days were past, that he would avoid many emotions if he slipped away that night, he banished that idea, too.

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Philip said, "It is time for us to start for home, but before we do so, play us something, Esther."

The hymn which Esther played had been sung in church that morning, and presently Philip, who was sitting with his eyes on the ground, began, without raising them, to sing. Then Bertha, standing beside Esther, added her voice; Esther, Saul, and Jonathan joined, one after the other; and several of them looked over to Jesse, who was a member of the church choir, and invited him by gesture to come too, but he shook his head and listened, smiling. Enjoying it more as they did more of it, they sang three times, and Esther was careful to select only songs of rejoicing. Different responses to the music were expressed by all the older faces in the room.

When they stopped it was fairly twilight, and a few minutes afterward the carriages of the visitors and a riding-horse for Philip were in the road, and the whole family was collected at the gate. The farewells to Saul and Bertha were particularly kind. Then the drawing back of the other young people, who felt that they were not now of chief interest, put Jesse into the centre of the group, and he collected himself to go through the leave-taking gracefully. He replied respectfully to Elias, who showed some feeling, and arranged the carriage-blanket for Cassandra; there was a general utterance of "Good-bye," and the old white horse started down the road. He thanked Heman again for letters of introduction, swung Henrietta into her phaeton, and kissed her back when she leaned over the wheel to kiss him; before the second good-byes had ceased the gray horse had paced around the white. He stood up to the look with which Philip took leave of him, and returned the strong hand-shake, and his eyes followed for a minute the

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man who had gone through life without forming close ties.

Now that the separation had commenced, he was increasingly anxious to know how it would go in the Thal; his observation became more acute; he was ready to eavesdrop if by so doing he could make sure that he would leave them happy or with a fair chance of happiness. His eye ran over the group, composed of all their children around Job and Susanna, in which he stood.

His father spoke to his mother: "How soon are you going to have supper?"

"It will be ready in about half an hour, if that suits you?"

"Very well. I shall hurry at the barn."

Such words and such consultation of convenience had passed between them for thirty years, thought Jesse, as he watched his mother going into the house.

Jonathan went to speak to his father, and as they stood together and discussed a certain piece of farm-work, Jesse watched with concentration the owner and the new head man; feeling the change of balance in the Thal since he had had the mill which Saul had come to take, and Saul and Jonathan were there on sufferance. Now he was not entitled to join in plans for the good of the land, and he remained on the outskirts of the conversation until Job went away to the barn.

Although he then found himself between the two couples, one on each side of the gate, he did not go, as he would have done at any other time, but stood looking at the sun, which had emerged from the clouds in time to set. Esther was the first to move, and Saul tried to detain her, and then asked, in half-audible monosyllables, why she went. With

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the same intimate half-expression she answered that she was going to help her mother, and then she replied to something visible to her in his face:

“I know it is not as it was, but think of what we made them feel.”

“Every one would say that we are better off here.”

“We know that we are not here for that, but to do all we can for them as they grow older.”

“Do you remember our Sundays in the two little rooms ? You and I alone.”

“Come in as soon as you can,” answered she, and went into the house without saying anything more, while Saul went to help Job.

Leaning against the gate-post, Jesse thought how far the pair who remained were from such regrets, and how full they would fill the Thal. He listened openly to what Jonathan was saying:

“Now it is over, dear. Not so bad, was it ?”

“They were all kind to me. I shall never forget that.”

It occurred to Jesse that if he were anxious to leave happiness behind him, much greater anxiety must beset Jonathan, who had taken so much on himself. Expecting more to be said, he waited, and the pause was so long that he looked over to his brother and was surprised. Bertha did not think it long until later; then she also looked up, and said:

“Jonathan, what is it ?”

Jonathan turned to her quickly. “Nothing.”

“There is. What ?” He did not reply, and she insisted further.

“I was thinking of the cost of all this,” he said.

Unperceived by them, Jesse gave his brother an applause

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look. Jonathan went on, in a tone which addressed itself both to Jesse and to Bertha.

"I have everything I want; but see what had to happen to give it to me. It is as if I had pushed my own brothers out of my way."

"You have done the best you could, and you will continue to do so," said Bertha. "Happily for us, there is no ground which that will not cover."

"By my soul, that sounds as if she might be a little stern with him!" thought Jesse. He did not move, but he got all their attention by his voice. "You did no pushing. Each one of us goes when it is his time—even from the Thal. What you have is yours by good rights, and you keep no one out of it; there is no one else to have it. You had better enjoy it, and not torment yourself."

The first astonishment at his junior disappeared from Jonathan's face, and a frank look was exchanged between them, after which he said, "I thank you, Jesse."

Nothing was added by Jesse, who continued to lean on the fence and gaze about him; and Jonathan, although he hesitated to say what more he had to say to Bertha, appeared not unwilling to have him hear it.

"You did not think, Bertha, from what I said just now, that I don't appreciate what I have?"

"No."

"You think you can be happy here, don't you?"

"I know I shall be happy," was the steady, soft reply.

After a minute Jonathan followed the other men, but she did not go in. Her eyes were fixed thoughtfully upon the sunset; and Jesse, observing her from under his lashes, thought that the time had come to ascertain the chances of happiness in the Thal, she being, as it seemed, the cus-

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todian of it. Now he knew less than ever her frame of mind and what standards she would use.

Without loss of time in beginning, he asked, with a gentleness which he did not feel, "What are you thinking, with such a grave face?"

"I too was thinking of the cost."

"How hard you two will take everything! You are not happy if you think of that."

"I am very happy, and I am very grateful; but all that has occurred here is so plainly before me to-night."

"You know you paid."

She did not notice the gibing tone, but continued, half to herself, "How many sacrifices were necessary to make the meeting to-day what it was, of feelings, and of ideals, and of wishes; and all these thwarted people had been following their best impulses, to follow which should have been virtue."

"And now their wings are clipped."

"It is, then, not possible for us to be as good as we want to be?"

"There is not room. Here we must only be as good as is convenient to our neighbors."

Determined to find out more about her, he tried the significant point again. "You paid; the damage is repaired as well as any one could do it. One item, however, still stands against you. How will you pay for me?"

"I don't know," she said, sadly. "I can think of nothing that I can do for you."

Although he had meant to tease her into some sort of self-betrayal, her way of taking it gave him pleasure, and softened him toward her. "Never mind me," he responded, lightly. "I was an anti-climax when I was born.

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This crowding out is an excellent thing for me. Otherwise I might have stuck to our fireside all my days, whereas now I shall see the world. Perhaps I shall come back a rich man."

As they looked at each other, thoughtful and smiling, he seemed to her more lonely than she had ever been. The mysteriousness of his character impressed her; she stopped thinking of herself to think of him. What was really in his heart now, she wondered. Was it Antony? Since he did not know the truth about the beating and the barn-burning he could still keep his heroic ideal; the omniscient Jesse could take refuge in ignorance.

He spoke again, with the idea of finding out what sort of Heilig she would make. "For the last few months the Thal has been a battle-ground for wills, and your will and father's were the chief contestants. Now there is peace, but how long will it last?"

"I can't wonder that you ask that," said she, "but I am going to try hard to make them, in time, cease to be sorry that I am here. I hope that I shall be able to live here so that they will not always be sorry."

"Why, a little while ago you were bracing up Jonathan!" he exclaimed.

"If I had expressed myself first he would have done the same for me."

"And now you speak timidly, like father and mother. Are you afraid?"

"Yes; of the times when I shall disappoint and hurt them. Perhaps I shall hurt him and not know it. I am afraid."

He looked down at her for a little, comparing this woman with the one who had taken possession of his mill.

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Then he said: "I am glad you are here. You need not be afraid. You will do well."

She kept her face raised to his and her eyes fixed upon his gratefully, although she realized every second more the extent of the tracts in his soul which she had not entered; and as she looked he seemed to be getting farther and farther away from her.

For him the moment was one of leave-taking. The disappearance of the Bertha he had known so engrossed him that when the new, pliant woman left him alone he hardly noticed her going, and the low, retreating sound of her steps fitted into his thoughts.

From thinking of her he passed to the other leave-takings which were before him, and dwelt upon them until the worst was over, and he could go through the reality without much feeling. He looked at his own life and at the future, the bitterness, and the bright gleams. Then his thoughts reverted.

"Antony, I keep watching for you and imagining I see you coming, as if I were a woman. Now Jonathan has all you wanted. They are rid of you, and they will soon be rid of me. I wonder where you are now."

He cast a long look over the Thal. The twilight was deep, the sky gray, streaked with watery yellow where the sun had set. The West looked far away.

THE END

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